

**Imagining Success, Experiencing Social  
Injustices and Learner Poor Performance**

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

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**Imagining Success, Experiencing Social Injustices  
and Learner Poor Performance**

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**2018**

## DECLARATION

I, Wade Cesaree' Cafun (student number 204500332), declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not previously been submitted by me, at any other university. It is my original work and I have acknowledged all the sources consulted and quoted in the reference list.

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Researcher

.....

Supervisor

.....

Date

## Dedication

*I dedicate this thesis to my mum, Jennifer Geldenhuis. Words cannot express how appreciative I am of you and all that you have done for me.*

*You have been my pillar of strength throughout my life and in particular in the last few years, which have been a very difficult time for both of us. I thank you for the love and support shown to me throughout my many years of studying. I thank you for believing in me and never losing hope, even when I found it difficult to believe in myself and had lost all hope of a brighter tomorrow. I thank you for remaining loyal and standing by me, even when it seemed no one else would. I thank you for knowing me, sometimes better than I know myself. But most of all, I thank you for being you, for without you none of my achievements would have been possible.*

*Your interest and seriousness about academics, I believe has culminated in my completing my PhD. You have always taken an interest in my studies and assisted me as much as possible for as long as I can remember. Starting with the extra reading and writing lessons you did with me when I was six years old, going through one letter of the alphabet each night. Guiding me through the difficulty of “C” “A” “T”- “BAT” hahaha! The values, interest and dedication which you instilled in me from a very young age remain with me over thirty years later. Were it not for your guiding hand in my developmental years I am certain that I would never be nearly as dedicated to academic pursuits as I am today. I get tremendous satisfaction from engaging in academics, and that is all thanks to you. So, the completion of this PhD is thanks to you.*

*So once again thank you, mum. - This one's for you.....*

*However, you will have to share it with Daina and Toby, the children I never had, my babies.*

*Daina and Toby, you will never be able to read this, but I thank both of you for your unconditional love and loyalty. I thank both of you for turning every house we lived in into a home and for bringing purpose to my life. I thank you for just always being there.*

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Very importantly, I would like to express my gratitude towards the learners who agreed to participate in my study. Without you my study would not have been possible.

But most importantly, I thank God.....

## **Abstract**

*The attainment of academic success is something to which most learners aspire. Sadly, many, and in particular learners from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to fall short of achieving such aspirations. This is especially the case when their achievements are measured against the academic rigour of their wealthier and certainly more advantaged counterparts. To ask marginalised learners to reflect on the attainment of academic success may therefore be unreasonable and impractical. It is for this reason, amongst others, that the notion of simply imagining success was pertinent in my study.*

*My study takes place against the backdrop of increasing instances of inequality both locally and globally. The site in which my study was based was in a historically “coloured” community in which the adverse effects of social injustice are an everyday reality for many who live and school within this community. The effects of inequality are clearly reflected in the everyday experiences of learners within schools. For instance, having to learn in environments that are neither welcoming nor conducive to the attainment of academic success are but some of the experiences that were commonplace in the lives of the twelve learners who participated in my study.*

*Positioned firmly within the discipline of social justice and employing a critical methodological approach, my study aimed to give voice to these twelve learners who have too often been silenced so as to serve the benefits of social groups who are already in positions of power. I thus attempted to answer questions which illuminate what the unique experiences of these learners were concerning instances of social injustice as well as how these experiences may or may not have influenced their imaginings of success, and ultimately their academic performance. From an axiological perspective, the realities of the twelve learners in my study were brought to the fore as I chose to dedicate a large portion of my study to both their spoken and written words surrounding their experiences of social injustices, their academic performance, and indeed their imaginings of success.*

*With an immense focus on the phenomenon of learners' imaginings, I relied heavily on the work of Gilles Deleuze to frame my study. However, remaining true to the critical theory paradigm and the discipline of social justice, I also turned to the writings of Paulo Freire. This enabled me to not merely research, but to also bring about change in the lives of the learners who participated in my study, albeit change which existed only in their minds. The use of photo elicitations, the writing of imaginative narratives, individual interviews as well as a focus group interview served as the means by which data was collected. Learners were thus given a diverse array of methods through which to communicate their experiences and imaginings.*

*Upon analysing the data, some of the findings which emerged suggested that learners are constantly exposed to low expectations and the doctoring of results; learners learn in environments of fear where their paths to success are often blocked; learners learn in spaces which represent unequal power relations; learners do have imaginings of success but they are influenced by exposure to social injustices in their school, and finally; learners have the potential to transcend their circumstances through their imaginings of success. Ultimately these findings as well as the theories of both Deleuze and Freire resulted in my developing what I called "the elliptic theory of imagination." True to its name, this theory demonstrated that while learners are able to eventually transcend their circumstances with the help of imagination, learners' imaginings nevertheless followed an elliptical orbit around their material realities.*

*At times learners' imaginings were too close to their realities and were therefore limited by them. While at others, learners' imaginings were too far afield from their realities and were thus unrealistic. Essentially, an implication of my study was that in order for imagination to operate as a vehicle for liberation, learners' imaginings must exist within an area of orbit which I called "the lavender zone." This zone is neither too close to, nor too far from one's material reality. Therefore, in this zone imagination was neither limited by experiences nor so far removed from reality that it became unrealistic.*

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# Chapter One

## Before Imagining

### 1.1 Introductory Words for “Imagining”

“Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you’ve imagined.” Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

The phenomenon under focus in my study was that of learners’ imaginings of success. It therefore seemed to me that the words of Thoreau, as quoted above, were an appropriate way as any in which to commence the presentation of my study. Having worked tirelessly on this study for several years and having elected to write my introduction last (while also writing my concluding chapter), has indeed left me with a dilemma. The dilemma being that I now find myself grappling with the question of what opening words would best do justice to a piece of work which remains so near to my heart; not to mention a piece of work which has consumed such an enormity of time and effort.

Needless to say when one sets about writing a doctoral thesis such an endeavour eclipses many other aspects of one’s life. For this reason, and others, my study is personal to me. Hence, throughout my study I make reference to “I” and have elected to refer to my study as “my study” rather than speaking of “the researcher” and “the study” as is often the case in many theses. The learners who participated in my study shared personal and unique accounts of experiences of injustices and imaginings of success. However, they often found their imaginings of success to be eclipsed by the realities to which they had become almost too accustomed. Nevertheless, they were able to use imagination to aid in their liberation. This, to me, remains a truly remarkable occurrence as they were not only freed in their minds, but oppressive constraints which shackled their possibilities of attaining success were finally broken. Therefore, few words, if any, in my mind do justice to, and are, worthy of introducing a study so personal to both me, and the learners who participated in it. Since I have experienced immense difficulty in finding such words; I have thus, to an extent,



resigned to relying on the words of others, extracted from an inspirational gift book given to me by an aunt when I was just 16 years old.

“All acts performed in the world begin in the imagination.” – Barbara Grizzuti Harrison (1941-2002)

Harrison’s words above; capture the essence of this introductory chapter which I have titled, “Before Imagining.” This is because it is in this chapter that I attempt to set the scene for my study by introducing one to the idea of beginning to imagine, prior to delving in to the finer details concerning learners’ imaginings of success. I will also, in this chapter, focus on the methods I used for data collection, theories upon which I relied, methods of data analysis, my findings and ultimately the theory which emerged from my study. Much of which I set out here therefore acts as a prelude, forming the foundation for my study as the aspects covered remain essential to one’s consideration prior to learners’ imaginings and all that resulted from such an engagement.

I have placed the word “imagining” in inverted commas in the heading to this section simply to signify the significance of that word in my study. “Imagining” is significant in my study because without it, there would be no imagining of success about which to speak. Essentially, in the absence of “imagining” there would be no study. However, I have chosen to only place it in inverted commas in this chapter because to do so throughout the study, I felt, may prove to be distracting to the reader. Nevertheless, given the significance of imagining in my study using this word such that it incorporates “imagination” is deemed appropriate by me. This is because the noun “imagination” would, given the engagement of the learners in my study, have little meaning and significance were it not encapsulated by the verb “imagining” which is the very act in which the learners in my study engaged to make this study possible. Thus, throughout my study I deliberately use these two words interchangeably.

While on the point of interchangeable usage of words, throughout my study and in my theorising chapter (Chapter 7) in particular, I use the words “elliptic” and “elliptical” in a manner that may, in the absence of an explanation, seem interchangeable. My reason for this is that “elliptical” is more acceptable when adhering to strict rules of English if one were to describe a pattern of movement. However, being a Geographer at heart, I have found that the

word “elliptic” is more commonly used in texts which specifically describe the pattern of movement the Earth follows around the sun. I therefore leaned towards naming my theory in a fashion more in line with the discipline of Geographical Sciences. Hence, in instances where I make specific reference to the movement of the Earth as well as my elliptic theory of imagination, I tend to use the word “elliptic.” Nevertheless, to remain grammatically correct, in instances where I make reference to the pattern of movement in general and how it bears out in my theory, but not specifically mentioning my theory by name, I use the word “elliptical”.

This chapter, in essence, serves to orientate the reader to my study, by not only clarifying the manner in which I use certain words which feature throughout my study, but also by providing a background to the study and thereby contextualising it. In this chapter attention is also drawn to the rationale for embarking on the study, and the statement of purpose and critical questions guiding the study are outlined. The scope and limitations of the study are outlined, as are the ethical considerations. I begin by describing the theoretical perspective and, very briefly, the methodology underpinning my study (greater detail will be paid to the methodology in chapter four). This serves to provide the backdrop against which my study was conducted. The chapter concludes by providing an outline of the format of my thesis and a summation of the chapter contents.

## **1.2 Rationale, Background and Context**

Although every learner is unique and indeed different, every learner should however, have an equal opportunity to achieve success (Meier & Marais, 2012). In the context of South Africa’s educational system, sadly this is not the case. I make such an assertion because Spaul (2013) has contended that the context in which education in South Africa is taking place is one in which vast inequities remain evident. These inequities include, amongst others, inferior education for the less wealthy. Bloch (2009) has argued that education in South Africa can be described as a national disaster. Bloch (2009) goes on to assert that globally South African learners were routinely underachieving. Spaul (2013) argued further that South Africa has the worst education system of all middle-income countries that participate in cross-national assessments of educational achievement. In fact, Spaul (2013) contended that South Africa performs worse than many low-income African countries while

only a small percentage of the more advantaged learners tend to perform well in the cross-national assessments, thus setting them up for success. Nevertheless, the vast majority of South African learners who grow up in poorer communities and attend poorer, less resourced schools remain destined for failure (Bloch, 2009).

An absence of value systems results in officials seldom being held to account for their actions, or in the instance of economically disadvantaged learners, officials are seldom held to account for their lack of actions (Bloch, 2009). An educational system therefore becomes stagnant and perpetuates inequalities which have been entrenched in its structures over years (Bloch, 2009). A result of educational stagnation Spaul (2013) asserts, results in socially unjust spaces of learning. These spaces form a large system of education which fuels the trapping of learners in a repeated cycle of exposure to poor performance. Freire (1996) however, argues that the truth about the individuals who are trapped within a second economy and who are clearly oppressed through social injustices; is that they were never “marginals” living outside society. Freire (1996) nevertheless, proffers that these individuals were rather inside a structure which made them “beings for others.” A solution suggested by Freire (1996) is therefore to transform the structure rather than integrate individuals into an already oppressive structure.

The above thus constitutes the backdrop against which my study took place. In the instance of learners performing poorly as a result of experiencing education in socially unjust spaces, a logical solution, in keeping with Freire’s (1996) argument above would then be to transform the space in which they learn so as to render it socially just. This seems preferable when weighed up against the alternative which suggests integrating marginals into a space which remains socially unjust, and accordingly acts to their detriment. However, given that the learners in my study faced repeated exposure to social injustices and poor academic performance I thought it reasonable to ask them to simply imagine future realities in which they were not exposed to social injustices and were therefore more likely to achieve academic success. I did this because asking participants to talk about and describe something which they may never have experienced seemed too far reaching and would likely yield little or no data for my study.

As a more theoretical justification for my use of imagination in my study, I relied on the work of Deleuze (1994). I did so because Deleuze's (1994) theory on merging ignorance with knowledge through the use of imagination responds to the need for understandings of reality to be a moving form, in that such understandings are ever becoming. Deleuze (1994) argued that knowledge was at a risk of becoming stagnated when one remained faced with knowing only what has previously been known. Hence, Deleuze (1994) suggested that through imagining our minds are freed to understand what was previously not understood as imagination takes one to the border which separates one's knowledge from one's ignorance. In an attempt to free the minds of the learners in my study from limitations inherent in their realities I used imaginative narratives as one of my data collection instruments. Further elaboration on this aspect will be provided in chapter four of my study in which I present the methodology.

Deleuze (1994) went on to claim that remaining at the border between knowledge and ignorance for long periods causes the lines between ignorance and knowledge to be blurred, and eventually knowledge and ignorance become one. Thus, in my study I felt it reasonable, relying on the work of Deleuze (1994) to conclude that in encouraging oppressed learners (or "marginals" in the words of Freire (1996)) to imagine futures free from such oppression may enable them to begin to know such futures. Accordingly, attaining such future would likely become easier than had it remained unknown to the learners in my study. The learners in my study, I therefore believed, through using imagination would certainly be in much better positions to be liberated by attaining academic success despite their experiences of social injustices. Therefore, my study was firmly positioned within the discipline of social justice.

### **1.3 Theoretical Perspective**

The theoretical perspective that informed my study was that of critical theory. As such I had to remain cognisant of the fact that from this critical perspective the world is not as it appears to be, or as presented as a natural order (Anderson 1990). Rather, Anderson (1990) argued, the world or one's reality is a creation by the powerful and the privileged. This reality is therefore oftentimes manipulated to sustain power and privilege (Freire 1996). In the context of education and within this paradigm schools exist as products of powerful interests and

forces. The practices, principles and indeed structures of schooling are causeways for the flow of power (Apple, 1982).

When schools exist as products for the benefit of those in power, unequal power relations within schools abound (Freire, 1996). Working within the critical paradigm, an expectation to question, interrogate, reveal, and challenge the power dimensions of schooling that privilege some and marginalise others could not be ignored (Apple, 1982). Thus, I had to remain mindful of the need to not only be a researcher but also an activist who would, in some way, bring about change through the process of my research. Accordingly, my attempts to free the minds of marginalised learners through the use of imaginative narratives could not go by the wayside in a study such as this, with its theoretical roots positioned firmly within the critical theory paradigm.

In addition, characteristic of working within the critical paradigm Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) have postulated that a voice must be given to the marginalised as their realities in a context of unequal power relations are ignored at the expense of dominant realities. For this reason, the chapters in my study are noticeably unequal in length. Chapters five and six which constitute the presentation and analyses of data comprise the largest portion of my study.

I, working within the critical paradigm, would have found the shortening of chapters five and six to accommodate other chapters hypocritical. For doing so would simply serve to marginalise the narratives and indeed the realities as told directly by the learners in my study. I therefore deliberately dedicated the largest portion of my study to allowing the realities of a group of marginalised learners to be voiced without limiting their voices to fit within the confines of limitations on chapter lengths. My study maintains a critical stance and therefore in keeping with this paradigm I foregrounded the voices of participants and their interpretation of their worlds as far as possible. Critical research is usually carried out to prompt transformation (Cohen *et al*, 2007). In my study, Freire's (1996) theory on structural transformation was therefore relied on when analysing the data and theorising my findings.

## 1.4 A Qualitative Methodology

Following a qualitative approach, I was able to develop a complex and holistic picture concerning the imagining of success of the twelve learners who participated in my study. I was also able to get rich and in depth accounts of their unique experiences of social injustices. Thus, fathoming how these socially unjust experiences influenced learners' imaginings of success was achievable. In addition, Tavallaei and Talib (2010) have contended that following a qualitative approach in research enables one to enter worlds of experiences unique to the participants. Using a qualitative approach, I assert that I was thus enabled to enter not only worlds of experiences unique to the learners in my study, but also their worlds of imagination became open to me.

Qualitative work considers how knowledge is produced and as such does not operate on an objective stance and involves interacting, communication and getting into the minds of participants (Greene, 2007). Thus understanding and indeed giving voice to imaginings which existed in the minds of the learners who participated in my study was brought to the fore. In bringing their imaginings to the fore I found that there were times when learners' imaginings were neither too close to, nor too far from, their material realities and thus avoided being limited and unrealistic. It was at these times, when learners' imaginings existed within what I called "the lavender zone" along the elliptical orbit around their material realities that their imaginations were truly able to act as a vehicle for liberation. The influences that imaginings of success and experiences of social injustices have on learners academic performance was thus brought into quite clear a focus as at these times, and in this zone, imagination aided the attainment of academic success. I will, however, elaborate much further on this finding in chapter seven. I merely mentioned it at this point to highlight the significance of giving a voice to the imaginings of the learners in my study. Such is the case because as expressed earlier, in the absence of the learners' voices concerning imaginings, I would have no study on which to report.

## **1.5 Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of my study was to explore and give voice to learners' experiences of social injustices and their imaginings of success. Since I wished to fathom how these imaginings and experiences may have influenced learners' academic performance, the focus of my study was on how learners' experiences of social injustices and their imaginings of success influence performance.

## **1.6 Research Questions which Guided my Study**

In my study, I attempted to answer the following research questions:

What are learners' experiences of social injustices?

How might these social injustices and socially unjust spaces influence learners' imaginings of success?

How might these imaginings influence learner performance?

Why might imaginings influence learner performance in the way that learners say they do?

## **1.7 Limitations**

My study was limited to the imaginings of success and experiences of social injustices and learner poor performance in respect of just twelve learners in one school in KwaZulu-Natal. Hence, I was not able to generalise the findings in my study to all learners who learn in contexts of social injustice and are capable of imagining success. However, generalisations were not the main purpose of my study as the purpose of my study, as explained, was to explore, and give voice to, learners' experiences of social injustices and their imaginings of success, as well as to fathom how these imaginings may have influenced learner

performance. This was quite easily achievable amongst the twelve learners within the one school selected for my study. In this respect the methodological limitation of my study extends into not knowing if, indeed, the learner performances of these twelve learners had changed. A longitudinal design would, perhaps, allow for following up on these learners over a period of time.

## **1.8 Format of my Thesis in terms of a Breakdown of the Chapters**

Chapter one “Before Imagining,” which included the background of my study, the rationale and critical research questions amongst other aspects, has already been presented. Thus, I will provide a breakdown for chapters ranging from chapter two onwards.

In chapter two “Literature Unimagined” I critically explore and review literature from multiple authors surrounding learner performance, socially unjust spaces and learner imagination. The literature review thus provides the framework for my study in terms of what is currently known about, the on-going debates that fuel further inquiry into the phenomena of learner imagination and learner performance as well as their possible relationship to each other.

I focus more specifically on Deleuze’s (1994) theory of imagination in chapter three which constitutes my theoretical framework chapter titled “Framing Imagination”. Here I attempt to explain how Deleuze’s (1994) theory was used in my study as well as how others have come to use and make sense of his work over the years. However, in this chapter I focus heavily on how Deleuze’s (1994) theory on imagination assists in merging the known with the unknown.

Chapter four “The Hows, Whys, Whos and Wheres of Imagining” sets out the methodological approach adopted by me in my study. In this chapter I explain the research design employed, instruments used to collect data and the rationale for these methodological choices. Details on how data was collected as well as methodological constraints and ethical issues are also explained.



I focus on the presentation and analysis of my data in chapters five and six. These two chapters are named “Aspects, experiences and spaces of social injustices’ and “Responses to social injustices and imaginings of success” respectively. In chapter five the themes attempt to answer my first two research questions. While in chapter six the themes respond to my second two research questions. In these chapters, many of the photographs used in the photo elicitation process are included so that readers may see, first hand, to what the learners in my study were referring at various points of the interviews. These two chapters combined constitute the largest portion of my study thus signifying that the oppressed will not be silenced further in my study.

In chapter seven “The Elliptic Theory of Imagination” my study begins to edge very close to the end. In this chapter I relate some of my findings to key constructs of Deleuze’s (1994) and Freire’s (1996) theories. Since this chapter constitutes the theorising aspect of my study, it is here that I present my “Elliptic Theory of Imagination” and attempt to explain how I constructed it based on my analyses and findings.

Finally, in chapter eight “After Imagining” my study draws to a close. It is in this chapter that I remind the reader of what it was I initially set out to do, respond to each of the research questions which guided my study and make recommendations.

## **1.9 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter I set the scene for my study by providing the context and rationale for my study. I began by explaining how and why I use certain words in the manner in which I do in my study. I also highlighted the objectives of my study along with the statement of purpose as well as the critical questions that I intend to address. I briefly presented the theoretical perspective informing my study and outlined the methodology used. A description of the research site and the participants in the study were alluded to. However, much greater detail concerning the research site and the participants will be provided in chapters five and four, respectively.

Finally, I concluded this chapter with a presentation of the format of my thesis by providing a succinct description of each chapter. Through setting this chapter out in the manner in which I did, it is hoped that the reader will have a clearer, but nevertheless broad perspective, concerning what to expect in my study. In the next chapter I present and critically discuss some of the literature which I deemed relevant to my study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Unimagined**

#### **Literature Review**

##### **2.1 Landscape of Literature**

The focus of my study was on how learners' experiences of social injustices and their imaginings of success influence performance. In this literature review I explain the phenomena of learner performance, learner imagination and socially unjust spaces by honing in on, and highlighting, key theories put forward by several authors pertaining to each of the mentioned phenomena. Relying on the work of theorists such as Bloch (2009), Spaul (2013), Gough (2004) and Deleuze (1994) amongst others, I demonstrate a link amongst the phenomena as well as isolate key constructs pertaining directly to each of the mentioned phenomena. This put me in a position to elevate those key constructs to influence the way in which I analysed and used the data in my study.

##### **2.2 Socially Unjust Spaces**

###### **2.2.1 Unjust Spaces of Exclusion, Categorisation and an Absence of Value Systems**

The context in which education in South Africa is taking place at present, is one in which vast inequities remain evident (Spaul, 2013). These inequities include, amongst others, inferior education for the less wealthy. On the point of inequities, extending beyond education, the Marikana mine incident serves as an example of how high levels of poverty and a frightfully large gap between incomes of the rich and poor can propel individuals to a sense of material exclusion (Hofmeyr & Nyoka, 2013). Material exclusion in this instance resulted as a direct consequence of exploitative practices on the part of the wealthy. Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) argue that increasingly value systems in society are at odds with the temptation of material gain. As a result of which, value systems are often ignored which ultimately causes the socially marginalised to become more exposed to exploitative practices propagated by those in power.

In the absence of value systems Bloch (2009) argues that officials are seldom held to account for their actions. In support of Bloch's (2009) argument Spaul (2013) contends that a lack of accountability for student learning outcomes is a major, if not the primary, obstacle to quality education for children from poor South African households, with a result often being learner poor performance. This lack of quality education, Spaul (2013) argues, dooms these children, in many instances, to perpetual poverty. Many parents, Donohue and Bornman (2014) argue, are thus forced to watch their children suffer the same fate which they had previously suffered. In many instances it is a fate that lacks quality education and so excludes their children from many an instance of achieving success, both academic success in school, and monetary success later on in life (Bloch, 2009; Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

Bloch (2009) takes the argument concerning one's being doomed to perpetual poverty a step further. He does so by contending that it appears as though our rural and poor schools are forming a second system of education which traps learners behind the massive blocks of the second economy. To Bloch (2009), a second economy is one which is riddled with unemployment and poverty. This claim finds support in Spaul's (2013) contention that an analysis of learner performance in South African public schools suggests that inevitably two distinct public school systems emerge. Spaul (2013) proffers that the smaller, better performing system accommodates the wealthiest 20-25 percent of learners who achieve high academic scores. The scores achieved by these learners range much higher than the scores achieved by the learners in the larger system which caters to the poorest 75-80 percent of learners. It is thus my belief that the statistics provided by Spaul (2013) concerning the percentage of learners who achieve high academic scores as well as those who achieve low academic scores serve to support the suggestion that categorisation of learners in schools can result in socially unjust spaces of learning. I am of this belief because those in Bloch's (2009) second system of education or Spaul's (2013) larger system will undoubtedly be more familiar with poor performance than those in the first or smaller system. This familiarity with poor performance would likely influence learners' views of themselves in respect of their performance, and their prospects of being successful at school.

Above, a picture of social injustice has been painted, with such injustices occurring in the very spaces in which learners are expected to perform. Honing in on the work of Freire, I, for the second time in my study note a significant argument of his at this juncture, because in my opinion, his argument is pertinent to understanding the socially unjust space in which learners

are required to perform. Freire (1996), as I mentioned previously, argues that the truth about the individuals who are trapped within a second economy and who are clearly oppressed through the social injustices described above, is that they were never “marginals” living outside society. Freire (1996) contends that they were rather inside a structure which made them “beings for others.” A solution suggested by Freire (1996) is therefore to transform the structure rather than integrate individuals into an already oppressive structure.

In the instance of learners performing poorly as a result of experiencing education in socially unjust spaces, a logical solution, in keeping with Freire’s (1996) arguments would then be to transform the space in which they learn so as to render it socially just. This solution is opposed to one which integrates learners into a space which remains socially unjust, and accordingly acts to their detriment. Such a solution would be a long-term one, hence Hofmeyr and Nyoka’s (2013) call for intergenerational equity seems logical. Intergenerational equity, according to Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) is a principle of distributive justice which concerns the relationship between past, present and future generations. In essence the multiple generations are required to enter into a partnership so as to minimise the possibility of future generations carrying the burden of the excesses of their predecessors where power was abused in the instances of exploitative practices, which more often than not, did in fact benefit some. The “some” in this case are likely those in power. However, in my study, I focus on those affected most by these socially unjust spaces. Hence, I asked learners to simply imagine success so as to extrapolate from that what ideal circumstances needed to be created for these learners so as to ensure the imagined success may take place in reality. This was done despite the learners’ familiarity with having to perform in socially unjust spaces. It is thus appropriate for me to now turn my attention, in this review, to learners’ “knowing” of unjust spaces and how such “knowing” comes about and is perpetuated.

### **2.2.2 Realising how Unjust Spaces come to be through Freire’s Action of “Knowing” the Unjust Spaces**

Focussing on how unjust spaces are realized through “an act of knowing” I believe that older arguments put forward by Freire (1970) are of significance as they relate directly to how

marginal beings come to know realities with which they are presented. Education is cultural action for freedom and therefore an act of knowing and not of memorisation (Freire, 1970). But what if the “knowing” to which Freire (1970) refers is what contributes significantly to learners’ experiences of poor performance? Freire (1970) argues that the act of knowing reduces the practice of education to a complex of techniques, naively considered to be neutral, by means of which the educational process is standardized in a sterile and bureaucratic operation with repetition being commonplace. It is in this context that Freire (1970) writes this article on the action of “knowing.” Freire (1970) contends that although the techniques are considered neutral, it is only through repetition that such consideration is taken as the norm, and this is sadly an operation of indoctrination.

In 1996 Freire, in one of his later works not only argued that marginalised beings are “beings for others” through existing inside a structure, but that they are also treated like objects which serve to perpetuate the oppressive structure. If one were to indulge me and momentarily consider marginalised beings as being objects undergoing repetition within an oppressive structure it would be valuable to note that Deleuze (1994, p.90) proffers that “repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it.” The argument of Deleuze (1994) thus appears to support Freire’s (1970) claim that through repetition, indoctrination is in operation. In addition, Elkjaer (2018) has contended that repeated experiences may serve to limit one’s ability to imagine anything which may differ from such experiences.

Freire, being an advocate of social justice likely intended for the act of knowing in education to be a means by which freedom is attained. However, given the grim light under which education is portrayed above, the “knowing,” through repetition, provides an educational context in which knowing likely encompasses a knowing of learner poor performance, and thus a lack of academic success. We therefore see that many learners, falling into the category of the marginalised, likely come to “know” all too well an educational structure riddled with social injustices (Banks, 2015). This “knowing” comes about, and is perpetuated by the repetition (repetition of two systems of education, repetition of lacking quality education, repetition of learner poor performance etc.) of what is considered neutral by the structure in which it occurs. Of course simply considering and accepting these occurrences

as neutral is rejected by Freire (1996) who argues that normalising oppressive occurrences in a structure through repetition of oppression must be brought to the light of day to be seen as oppression itself.

Moving away from the context in which Freire's (1970) article was written and focussing now on some of the main arguments, it should be noted that Freire suggests an emergence of a twofold pattern of oppression. Freire (1970) suggests that on the one hand the culturally alienated society is dependent on the society that oppresses it. But on the other hand, within the alienated society itself, a regime of oppression is imposed upon the masses by a few power elites. Nevertheless, Freire (1970) argues that in either case the culture was established and maintained as a culture of silence. Maintaining a culture of silence is all too easy when such culture is taken as the norm (Adams & Bell, 2016).

Applying Freire's (1970) arguments to my study, it is apparent that Freire (1970) is of the view that the oppressed are often silenced, thus giving a voice to them may fly in the face of oppression itself. Accordingly, calling on the oppressed to express personal narratives to aid forward progression, as suggested by Barone (2009) and Barrientos and Hulme (2016), would likely find much support from Freire (1970), who is renowned for opposing oppressive practices. With regard to being silenced within their own group of "the oppressed" Adams and Bell (2016) as well as Young (2000) have contended that it is often the oppressed who become oppressors themselves. This could be related in some way to, and even find support within, one of Freire's (1996) later arguments concerning education, where he argues that the oppressed tend to engage in a pedagogy with which they are familiar. The pedagogy to which Freire (1996) refers is one of oppression (Freire, 1996). Nevertheless, it remains apparent that Freire's (1970) twofold pattern of oppression holds true, and in particular, with relation to education. This is because oppression is imposed not only by the society oppressing the alienated, but also by members of the alienated group themselves, likely because they know no better, or as Freire (1996) would put it, relating this discussion back to education, the oppressed engage in the pedagogy of the oppressed which acts to perpetuate oppression.

### **2.2.3 Knowing what Constitutes Unjust Spaces**

A space in which the acceptance of positive contributions to aid liberation must not be rejected, argues Freire (1970). He makes this claim irrespective of where these positive contributions originate. However, if one were to focus on where contributions originate, a startling problem often encountered when suggesting ways to liberate the oppressed is the problem of sociological reduction, or rather a lack of such (Freire, 1970). This is particularly the case when ways of liberation seem to come from those already in power (Freire, 1970). Sociological reduction, according to Alcadipani (2017) and Freire (1970) is a sociological adaptation of ideas (or positive contributions to aid liberation) to better suit their new context. In essence, Alcadipani (2017) and Freire (1970) are suggesting that despite how well-meaning ways of obtaining liberation suggested by those in power may be, these means cannot simply be transplanted from one context to the other with the expectation that they will work. Such is the case as contexts are complex, ever-changing and unique (Banks, 2015). Therefore, whatever the ideas suggested by those in power may be, a sociological adaptation of the ideas to fit the context will be required.

A reason for the means towards liberation not working in the context of the oppressed is simply that often these groups lack voice as they have emerged from constant experiences of being silenced (Freire, 1970). Freire (1970) goes on to assert that to make the oppressed aware of this plight of silence and so highlight the need for a sociological reduction of proposed ways towards liberation is a step towards empowering the oppressed to use positive ideas proposed by those in power, but in a way that suits their unique contexts. Such assertion can be supported by Adams and Bell (2016) who argue that one way of empowerment is to bring all matters that perpetuate oppression to the light of day, in other words, make people aware of these matters, so that they may be addressed. Thus, it can be argued that one must accept positive contributions to aid liberation, but one must be mindful that an adaptation of certain proposed means of obtaining liberation may be necessary to better suit the context of those using such means. Accordingly, the participants in my study, having been constantly exposed to a context of oppression may require additional support when asked to envision a way towards success. Thus, simply imagining success, rather than



explicitly plotting out how one may achieve it, was an easier and more achievable task for them.

A key finding put forward by Freire (1970) in “knowing unjust spaces” is that once a space is known, transformation of such space is inevitable. He found that not only does education act as a means of obtaining liberation in providing individuals with the requisite knowledge to identify unjust spaces, but knowing how to identify them and address them is learned best through active dialogue between those being taught and those doing the teaching. This finding appears to have very strong ties with Freire’s (1996) later work in which he calls for structural transformation so as to accommodate the marginalised as both works place transformation of unjust spaces under the spotlight. The idea of promoting active dialogue in teaching for liberation finds support in the work of Vittoria, Stollo, Brock and Romano (2014) who promote transformative learning using Freire’s (1970) ideas of giving voice to those being taught so that they may engage in active dialogue with those teaching. It is thus apparent that giving a voice to the marginalised will promote their learning of how to identify unjust spaces and so begin to take active steps towards, as Freire (1996) promotes, transforming such spaces, which Freire (1970) argues becomes inevitable once identified.

The transformation of unjust spaces was initially referred to by Freire in 1985 as “structural transformation.” To bring Freire’s (1985) notion into perspective and thus highlight its relevance in my study one should be reminded of Bloch’s (2009) argument that our rural and poor schools are forming a second system of education which traps learners behind the massive blocks of the second economy. A second economy, according to Bloch (2009), is one which is riddled with unemployment and poverty. Learners tend to get categorised such that they may fall into this second economy, and such categorisation may serve to support the suggestion that categorisation of learners can result in socially unjust spaces of learning as those in Bloch’s (2009) second system of education or Spaul’s (2013) larger system will undoubtedly be more familiar with poor performance than those in the first or smaller system. This familiarity with poor performance would likely influence learners’ views of themselves in respect of their performance, and their prospects of being successful at school. However, bearing in mind Freire’s (1985) call for structural transformation, one should note that he argues that the truth about the individuals who are trapped within a second economy and who

are clearly oppressed through the social injustices described above, is that they were never “marginals” living outside society. Freire (1985) proffers that these individuals to whom he refers as “marginals,” were rather inside a structure; a structure which made them “beings for others.” A solution suggested by Freire (1985) is therefore to transform the structure rather than integrate individuals into an already oppressive structure. So in respect of socially unjust spaces it is here that my study fits into debates with structural transformation being highlighted as close ties with Freire’s (1970) earlier rejection of merely adopting supposed “well meaning” ways of obtaining liberation suggested by those already in power without rather getting the structure to fit the oppressed is evident.

#### **2.2.4 A Developing Context of Socially (un)justice Spaces: What are Unjust Spaces**

The context in which education is taking place globally is by many accounts a developing one (Banks, 2015; Nieuwenhuis, 2011). Needless to say, social justice itself is still developing within these developing contexts (Banks, 2015). Nieuwenhuis (2011) highlights that because of a general unfamiliarity with developing social justice; one is often tempted to rely on policy to address all social justice related instances, in particular, instances occurring within education itself. He likens this overreliance on policy to one having only a hammer with which to work. Nieuwenhuis (2011) claims that if one only has a hammer with which to work, then one is tempted to treat all other tools as nails. Similarly within the context of education it appears as though policy is the only tool with which one is provided when dealing with social justice issues. Accordingly, Nieuwenhuis (2011) argues that whenever a social justice related problem occurs we are tempted to beat it with the policy hammer until it breaks into fragmented pieces, and thereafter we deal with each one of these pieces using policy again. This high dependency on policy to deal with social justice issues in education form the backdrop against which Nieuwenhuis (2011) writes his article concerning social justice in education.

An over dependency on policy is problematic as Fineman and Gear (2016) as well as Gynther (2009) have argued that policy forms mere formal equality and with formal equality comes an equal application of rules. However, as Nieuwenhuis (2011) contends an equal

application of rules in an already unequal context yields unequal results. Gynther (2009) draws a distinction between formal equality and substantive equality with formal equality being a mere equal application of rules, as suggested above. While the latter, substantive equality, focuses more on disadvantage, holding that the greater the disadvantage to which one has been subjected, the greater the support one should receive. Hence, unlike with formal equality, in the instance of substantive equality an unequal application of rules is often necessitated. It thus becomes apparent, that when taking into consideration the different degrees of disadvantage to which people have been subjected, to merely rely on policy, which forms a type of formal equality, is insufficient.

The need for an application of substantive equality, especially within the South African context is highlighted by Mamphela Ramphele (2008) in her book *Laying ghosts to Rest*, in which she writes about how South Africans are still plagued by inequalities of the past. She argues that settlement patterns still reflect the inequalities of the past. Ramphele (2008) contends that many a white family home, which has now been in one's family for several generations was often purchased at a subsidised rate and has now multiplied tenfold in value. Whereas people of colour are having to only invest in such properties at a present day higher and unsubsidised rate. Surely in such an instance mere formal equality would be an insult to the dignity and emancipation of many an oppressed individual. Nevertheless, relating this discussion back to education and the developing context of social justice Ramphele (2008) hones in on how might one who fell victim to such practices view oneself, even contemporarily when such individual's counterparts are performing better academically, perhaps largely attributed to the conducive environment in which one is engaging in homework and studying etc. (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Such consideration doesn't even begin to pay homage to the actual context in which the victim of these practices is likely being schooled at present, and the social injustices inherent in such a context (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Nevertheless, Fineman and Gear (2016) suggest that in most instances it is far easier for the oppressed to seek emancipation through substantive equality than formal equality. Thus the beating of social justice issues, as Nieuwenhuis (2011) puts it "with a hammer" in the context of education receives very little support from Ramphele (2008), Gynther (2009) as well as Fineman and Gear (2016).

### 2.2.5 Idealising Unjust Spaces to Render them Just

One of Nieuwenhuis's (2011) key arguments is that achieving a space that is socially just is an ideal, yet social justice itself permeates all aspects of human life, and it is for this reason that social justice cannot be attained merely through policy itself. Nieuwenhuis (2011) goes on to argue that social justice needs to come home in the hearts and minds of people as it is something that must be lived and not forced through policy. Such argument finds support by Adams and Bell (2016) as well as Bell (1997) who contend that social justice is both an ideal and a goal and as such it is incumbent on us present generations to constantly work towards achieving it through our daily actions.

In contrast to Nieuwenhuis's (2011), Bell's (1997) and Adams and Bell's (2016) arguments above, Furman (2012) contends that to develop one's capacity to promote social justice in pedagogy, policy is required to set out and guide the praxis developed to achieve social justice. Surely an identification of what praxis are socially just may be stipulated in policy itself but as Barrientos and Hulme (2016) as well as Hoadley, Christie and Ward (2009) note, much of the existing policies concerning social justice and the attainment of socially just learning spaces are highly idealised and thus fall short in the ordinary contexts of teaching and learning. It thus appears that Nieuwenhuis's call for social justice attainment to rather come through the hearts and minds of those involved would receive much support from Barrientos and Hulme (2016) as well as Hoadley *et al* (2009). I was therefore inclined to promote the attainment of social justice through one's heart and mind in my study which influenced my interpretation of the data produced, with particular reference to how one's mind may be freed through imagination so as to better embrace a socially just space.

Despite Nieuwenhuis's (2011) contention that social justice should be attained through the hearts and minds of those involved, Nieuwenhuis (2011) nevertheless suggests that at least two principles are required to achieve social justice in education. The two principles are; personal autonomy and educational equality. To achieve the former, Nieuwenhuis (2011) argues that each learner should be given the opportunity to step back and reflect on the self, while teachers should view the enabling of this process as part of their ordinary duties. Regarding

the latter, educational equality, Nieuwenhuis (2011) appears to rely heavily on Gynther's (2009) call for substantive equality, as discussed earlier. Nieuwenhuis (2011) contends that to achieve educational equality learners who have been previously disadvantaged ought to receive more support in reaching their full potential than those previously advantaged.

In 1998 Pitt, had already argued against views similar to Nieuwenhuis's (2011) later view, as expressed above. Pitt (1998) claimed that to call for personal autonomy strips one of any responsibility towards society with a focus purely on one's own advancement. Later, Martineau (2013) held a similar view to that of Pitt (1998), claiming that the interests of one's broader community are forced to play second fiddle to the interests of autonomy in contemporary western societies. In addition, Pitt (1998) also argued that if educational equality was to be achieved through providing greater support to the previously disadvantaged, this may breed a culture of dependency on the state resulting in individuals taking very little responsibility for their own development. Nevertheless, Nieuwenhuis (2011) likely familiar with Pitt's (1998) earlier criticisms of similar views added a twist to the 2011 view claiming that personal autonomy must be promoted in group settings so that the importance of it for others can be observed. This would likely curb the excesses of individual agency while promoting human dignity. Curbing excesses of present individuals would seem to correlate with Hofmeyr and Nyoka's (2013) call for redistributive justice which aims to limit excesses of present generations so as to benefit future generations. One can only infer that it was through the promotion of human dignity that an over reliance on state would also be curbed, however Nieuwenhuis (2011) does not go as far as explicitly making this claim. Thus, one should remain cognisant of the fact that learners are performing in a context which although being a well-meaning one in respect of promoting personal autonomy and educational equality, is nevertheless a flawed context. The contextual flaws alluded to above, would likely influence learners' imaginings of success to the degree that imaginings themselves may encompass too heavy a dependency on others effecting positive change.

## **2.2.6 Concluding Remarks on a Developing Context (unjust spaces)**

Achieving a socially just space with particular reference to education is anything but easy because officials appear to be tempted to simply rely on policy to achieve social justice in education. However, with social justice being an ideal it must exist rather in the hearts and minds of people as policy often calls for formal equality which does not take into consideration the unique contexts of the marginalised. Even when substantive equality is promoted it brings with it the danger of breeding an over dependence on the state, thus individuals take little, if any, responsibility for their own advancement. It appears as though the marginalised are caught between two approaches to developing social justice in present unjust educational contexts. These two approaches have been developed by those in power; and tend to yield a double edged sword. Perhaps, rather asking those most affected by the present contexts and the proposed approaches, i.e. the marginalised in society, to imagine a way forward may be more feasible than what is presently on the table. My study is thus given merit as the hearts and minds of those most affected and often silenced are given a voice through their narratives and expressions of their freed minds.

## **2.3 Learner Imagination**

### **2.3.1 Introducing Learner Imagination**

Gough (2004) argues that writing can be a method of discovery and in respect of educational inquiry, writing stories, or rather “narrative experiments” as referred to by Gough (2004) can be a way of finding out about oneself and about the world. Such belief finds support in the assertion made by Vinz (1997) that the retellings of school lives provide an opportunity for members of the schooling community to find a performative way to confront a particular moment or condition, which is particularly beneficial when such moment or condition matters to their current ways of being, believing or acting. In my study the moments and conditions have been focused on learner performance, but with a twist, as the use of one’s imagination was of significance in the writing of the participants’ stories of learner performance. In particular, academic success was imagined.

Social justice, according to Bell (1997), is both an ideal and a goal. Young (2000) and Adams and Bell (2016) have argued that completely socially just spaces are non-existent as they remain a part of this ideal and goal. I was thus inclined, in my study, to rather call on learners to simply imagine performing in spaces which are socially just, and so aid success. When attempting to free the mind so as to explore all possible solutions to a problem (in this case the problem being learner poor performance) Vinz (1997) highlighted the need to dislodge embedded meanings. Vinz (1997) argued that imagining could be taken as a sort of science fiction which enabled one to begin writing at the frontiers of one's knowledge as one would then be freed from what was previously known as a result of past experiences. This claim can be supported by Deleuze's (1994) argument that imagining will take one to the border which separates one's knowledge from one's ignorance; and through remaining at that border for long enough (through imagination) ignorance and knowledge will eventually become one. In the case of my study I wished for the learners to be freed from what they previously knew about their performance from experiences of repeated poor performance and to then simply imagine an ideal in which success in respect of their performance suddenly became a great possibility. Hence, the significance of Deleuze's (1994) and Vinz's (1997) claims in my study cannot be denied.

### **2.3.2 Imagination in the Context of Education**

In the last decade the popularity of imagination has increased rapidly in the works of many great minds (Egan, Juddon & Madej, 2015; Elkjaer, 2018; Fleer, 2013; Nielsen, Fitzgerald & Fettes, 2010). The importance of imagination in education has been widely recognised, but only as far as developing learners cognitively is concerned (Egan *et al*, 2015; Elkjaer, 2018; Nielsen *et al*, 2010). Thus, the use of imagination in aiding the general plotting out of achieving academic success is somewhat of a neglected field. Nielsen *et al* (2010) write in a context in which imagination is just beginning to be viewed as a fundamental part of a trend towards qualitative and integrative inquiry. In my study I have highlighted the qualitative aspect of the experiences and imaginings of a group of oppressed learners while attempting to integrate their conceived and even imagined ways towards achieving success. I have thus allowed the work of Nielsen *et al* (2010) to influence how I analysed and made sense of the

data in my study. I have also used it to alert one to some of the aspects of the importance of imagination in setting out the context of my study.

Nielsen *et al* (2010) highlight that since the cognitive revolution of the 1940's there has been a tendency amongst theorists to view the mind as a computational device and so imagination has often been viewed as something that can merely be programmed into learners provided they are given the right ques. In 1997, however, Bruner argued that the mind is also constituted by, and realised in, human culture. Thus, imagination need not be programmed into learners but rather nurtured and allowed to run free through merely existing in a space where a culture of a free imagination is present. To achieve this space and breed such a culture Vygotsky (1980) has suggested that educators should shift their focus from individual competence of learners purely regarding academic work towards how education equips individuals to participate in important aspects of the culture in which education is embedded, in this case a culture of free imagination.

A culture of free imagination may not be as easy to achieve as one may initially believe it to be. This is because it must be noted that Nielsen *et al* (2010), through supporting Bruner's (1997) claim of imagination being realised in human culture, are driven to concede that imagination is also closely linked to narratives of experiences in the culture itself. This link exists because as Nielsen *et al* (2010) argue, in expressing narratives we do so subjectively, often relying on imagination to add coherence to our perspectives. Imagination, according to Nielsen *et al* (2010) thus becomes a source of meaningful experience offering a rich heritage of stories. Such contention is supported by Hones (2011), in her work on narrative space and imagination, who claims that because experiences take place in spaces and our imaginations help make sense of such spaces when reflecting on experiences to produce narratives, one finds that narratives of experience and imagination become inseparable. If our experiences are not free (contextually by economics, social injustices etc.) then it becomes likely that our imaginations follow a similar path of limitation, even when filling in the blanks to add coherence to narratives (Egan *et al*, 2015). It thus becomes imperative that having a free imagination be promoted in learners from as early as possible, otherwise their imaginings may very well become limited by experience. A context of education which promotes such a



culture of free imagination is therefore required if imagination is to be used in the emancipation of marginalised learners.

### **2.3.3 Inequality in Imagination through Context**

Despite the dire need for educational contexts that promote free imagination, sadly much of South Africa's marginalised find themselves being educated in a context of gross inequality (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Hofmeyr and Nyoka, 2013). Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) contend that a lack of accountability on the part of officials who influence learning contexts fosters the all too familiar instances of learner poor performance, instances to which marginalised learners have become well accustomed. However, Spaul (2011) suggests that although weak accountability within the education system is largely to blame for the contexts in which learners learn. To call for greater accountability without support is flawed. This is because such an approach, according to Spaul (2011) would be tantamount to providing one with added resources but then not asking one to account for their use. It thus appears as though improved accountability in the absence of support would yield little result in improving the learning contexts that exist contemporarily. Meanwhile, in the time officials spend grappling with this dilemma, the learners who come from the most marginalised communities appear to continue to suffer. Thus, simply demanding improved accountability despite the absence of support may not be as undesirable as Spaul (2011) may be inclined to argue if it is this improved accountability that will serve to better the contexts of free imagination for the marginalised.

Mandela himself, despite his political loyalty and convictions placed a winning South Africa through the development of the minds of the youth, above a desire for any individual winning faction or entity (Hofmeyr and Nyoka, 2013). Yet, sadly what is happening at present is simply that the gap between the marginalised of society and the society to which they long to belong grows ever larger at an alarming rate (Adams & Bell, 2016). The so called "winning" of an elite group is thus evident while those left behind remain trapped in a learning context of startling injustices. These injustices may entail a lack of basic physical resources, a lack of human resources in the form of qualified and competent educators, and more importantly for

the purposes of my study, a lack of the freedom and ability to imagine success. This lack of freedom to imagine success being constantly exacerbated by the contexts in which learners are forced to learn as Nielsen *et al* (2010) have so eloquently contended in their works which highlight how a context of limited practice and experience may limit imagination in education. Imagination thus becomes a means by which limitation of one's potential is promoted rather than a vehicle of liberation.

### **2.3.4 Imaginative Attitudes**

Remaining on the point of freeing one's mind, I think it incumbent upon one at this juncture to turn to one of the classic philosophers who frame my understanding of the role of imagination in achieving the goals of my study, and that is Deleuze himself. Deleuze (1994) argues that if actions and thoughts or imaginings were not differentiated then the universe would remain an amorphous totality. I have interpreted this as Deleuze's way of reminding one to imagine freely, yet maintain with a free imagination some degree of realism. This is because, in reality, not all thoughts, or imaginings can be put into actions (Elkjaer, 2018). Nevertheless, in my study I rely heavily on the imaginings of those marginalised to plot out an imagining of a way forward towards success. However, I do remain mindful of limitations inherent in turning imaginings into realities; as contextual constraints may prevail (Elkjaer, 2018). Deleuze (1994) himself argues that differentiating between actions and imagination brings a finite element into the process of dematerialising. Deleuze's (1994) process of dematerialising is a process by which imagination enables one's mind to move beyond the constraints of contextual, material surroundings and so imagine a desired outcome irrespective as to how unattainable it may at first glance appear. However, this process will be discussed and explained in greater detail in my theoretical chapter on Deleuze (1994).

Deleuze (1994) suggests that because many people learn through repetition of concrete, material experiences, our actions, however well imagined, are never entirely divorced from the material reality. In my study, Deleuze's suggestion above is relevant as the marginalised have experienced repetitively social injustices and perhaps even learner poor performance. Thus, expecting to come up with a solution that eliminates social injustice and poor

performance in their entirety is largely unrealistic. Nevertheless, in accordance with Deleuze (1994), the ability to imagine will, to a great degree, free one from many of the restraints inherent in one's repeated experiences of social injustices and learner poor performance. Thus, my desire to facilitate the imagining of a way forward and towards success, but realistically was achieved through the use of Deleuze's (1994) understandings and interpretations of imagining. In essence, bearing in mind Deleuze (1994), the imaginative attitude of the participants in my study had to remain realistic thus influencing me to seek imaginings which remained realistic when considering the materialism to which the participants in my study were exposed. Very closely related to imaginative attitudes through adding to the influence of realism on imaginings, is the accuracy of imaginings highlighted by Langland-Hassan (2014), which will now be discussed.

Imaginings tend to guide one's actions with varying degrees of success (Langland-Hassan, 2014). Imaginings can often lead to success in finding solutions to problems, but may also cause dangerous miscalculations (Egan *et al*, 2015). With respect to the resulting success of imaginings and their accuracy, people have a tendency to swing between two poles. At the one pole imaginings are determined by voluntary control in that what we imagine is what we wish to imagine and is in no way determined by what is present before us (Langland-Hassan, 2014). Viewed in this manner we may achieve a trivial form of success as we simply imagine whatever we may desire. However, at the other pole the element of accuracy in imaginings is introduced in that what we imagine is influenced by, and related to, what is present around us (Langland-Hassan, 2014). To me these two poles merely represent the merging of experiences and desires as expressed under the heading preceding this one, but with an action of adding accuracy or rather a sense of realistic imagining. Accordingly, the resulting desire or dematerial state of transcendence is moderated to a degree by what is present before one. Thus, Deleuze's (1994) desire for a realistic imaginative attitude is supported.

In respect of my study, understanding imaginings in the manner expressed above, that is, understanding imaginings with a sense of accuracy, so to speak, will influence my analysis of the data in my study. My analysis will likely be influenced to the extent that the participants' desires may never be entirely divorced from their experiences which are present before them

and in an immaterial state. Accordingly, the vehicle for liberation which is largely created by imagination will not be allowed to become something that is so farfetched, especially for the marginalised, that it is almost impossible for them to ever access. Otherwise, my entire study would serve little practical value for the ones whom I seek to liberate. Thus this accuracy of imaginings proposed by Deleuze (1994) through their relation to what is present before one is of tremendous significance in my study.

## **2.4 Learner Poor Performance**

### **2.4.1 Learner Poor Performance and Inequitable Quality of Education**

In 2009 Bloch (2009) argued that education in South Africa could be described as a national disaster. Bloch (2009) contended that globally South African learners were routinely underachieving. This underachieving, Bloch (2009) argued, was despite the country's status as Africa's most industrialised nation with its vastly superior resources when compared to other African countries. Echoing Brown and Lauder's (1996) claim that the economic prosperity of a nation is dependent on the educational upliftment of its citizens, Bloch (2009) contended that education was key to growing the skills required in a cut-throat competitive world. However, with reference to the superior resources mentioned above, Bloch (2009) went on to note that because South Africa was a developing nation, those resources were neither evenly distributed nor evenly available to all citizens, with the marginalised often being on the receiving end of such unequal distribution. The quality of education received by citizens, according to Bloch (2009), was thus inequitable. In my discussion concerning socially unjust spaces, it is apparent that to this date, not much has changed. Accordingly Bloch's (2009) arguments concerning inequitable distribution of resources and the associated learner poor performance, remain relevant.

More recently, Spaul (2013) has argued that South Africa has the worst education system of all middle-income countries that participate in cross-national assessments of educational achievement. What is more, Spaul (2013) says, is that South Africa performs worse than many low-income African countries. In fact, according to Donohue and Borman (2014) only a small percentage of the more advantaged learners tend to perform well in the cross-national

assessments, thus setting them up for success. However, the vast majority of learners remain destined for failure (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). In many instances the learners destined for failure are also doomed to perpetual poverty. These claims appear to correlate with Bloch's (2009) contention that our schooling system is enforcing the social and economic marginalisation of the poor and vulnerable. To support this claim, Bloch (2009) suggests that there exists two systems of education in South Africa; one for the wealthy, often guaranteeing success, and the other for the poor, often dooming one to failure. In my study, which focuses on learner performance and success in socially unjust spaces, these key constructs of learner performance explained by Bloch (2009) and Spaul (2013) have been elevated to influence the way in which I analysed and used the data obtained. This performance, as is evident above, and in line with the focus of my study, takes place within a specific context. As is evident above, this context is one of social injustices; the associated learner poor performance with such contexts will now be discussed.

#### **2.4.2 Learner Poor Performance in Lingering Country-Wide Injustices and a Lack of Accountability**

Social injustice continues to linger within the broader South African context, fuelling learner poor performance in disadvantaged communities (Hofmeyr and Nyoka, 2013). With growing inequality, a constant rise in poverty and a sense of faltering leadership, it is no wonder South African citizens are left feeling disillusioned after more than 20 years of democracy (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Whether one makes reference to poor service delivery in regards to healthcare or education, or any other sector, what remains evident according to Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) is the fact that it is the most destitute who suffer most. This suffering through social injustices is most evident in education through the learner poor performance displayed by many a learner coming from marginalised communities in South Africa (Bloch, 2009).

In respect of the education sector, a lack of accountability on the part of officials for student learning outcomes is a major, if not the primary, obstacle to quality education for children from poor South African households (Bloch, 2009). Spaul (2011) contends that as a result of this lack of accountability these children from poor households are doomed to remain trapped

in conditions of poverty. A reason for their being doomed to conditions of poverty is that as the quality of education for this marginalised group dwindles so too do their chances of academic success and the related, later attained, economic success (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Spaul (2011) suggests that weak accountability exists throughout the education system, from the national Department of Basic Education right to the classroom. This suggestion is supported by Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) who argue that weak accountability appears pervasive and so infects and spreads like a cancer not just through education but through the lives of those most vulnerable in society. Accordingly, a lack of accountability becomes the norm. It is thus not surprising then that Spaul (2011) goes on to call for improved accountability. Spaul (2011) nevertheless notes that a greater emphasis on accountability without commensurate support is as flawed as an approach in which more resources and support are pumped into the system without holding officials to account for their use.

### **2.4.3 An Attempted Accountability Programme to curb Poor Performance**

In 2013 Sims wrote about school accountability programmes in the United States which spanned the 1990's and early 2000's. These programmes basically adopted the approach of "no child left behind" where sanctions were imposed on schools for learner poor performance while schools imposed sanctions on learners for poor performance. What Sims (2013) discovered was that although on the face of it such an accountability programme appeared to be a step in the right direction in terms of holding stakeholders to account for poor academic performance, many adverse effects resulted. For instance, the programmes failed to take into consideration demographic differences in respect of which groups constituted the majority of learners in schools. Accordingly, varying backgrounds of the learners were not considered. Thus, schools that served the more affluent and so cultural capital rich communities tended to perform better and so received fewer sanctions (Sims, 2013). All of this culminated in demotivating poor performing schools and learners even further. Little if any improvement in learner performance in the marginalised communities was noted (Sims, 2013).

Figlio and Rouse (2006) highlighted that the sanctioning of schools and often public humiliation of them for producing poor academic results often resulted in many a poor

performing school doctoring the learners scores rather than face sanctioning and humiliation. Sims (2013) argues that the threat of public stigma faced by schools prone to learner poor performance scared many schools into doctoring results thus perpetuating or even accentuating the poor academic performance of the learners. This, Sims (2013) argues, was largely because learners then fell victim to the belief that their current performance was acceptable as each time they took a test despite how poorly they performed the school reflected favourable results.

A further problem associated with the accountability programme adopted by the United States in the 1990's and early 2000's Sims (2013) notes, was that the more subgroups a school had, the greater the school's chance of general poor performance. These multiple subgroups, save for the desired white middle class, often included black learners, Asian learners and Hispanic learners, all of whom generally came from disadvantaged backgrounds (Sims, 2013). Hastings and Weinstein (2007) contended that quite naturally if an increased number of subgroups generally produced overall poorer performance many schools then became reluctant to accept learners representative of these subgroups. Hence, the already marginalised and disadvantaged were facing even greater disadvantage as gaining access to schools became increasingly difficult as a result of this accountability programme.

#### **2.4.4 Concluding Remarks on the Attempted Accountability Programme**

Accountability is most certainly a factor which requires much consideration when tallying learner performance in schools, as Spaul (2011) and Bloch (2009) quite eloquently contend. However, as is highlighted by Sims (2013) accountability programmes which fail to take into consideration the unique contexts and backgrounds of those to whom they apply can often result in achieving outcomes quite far afield from what was initially desired. As has been highlighted above, accountability, although key in improving learners' performance, when associated with sanctions and public humiliation, public stigma and labelling can result in demotivation on the part of those learners already performing poorly. Also, schools can find themselves forced into positions of having to doctor results to save face. But this simply masks and so perpetuates and accentuates learner poor performance. If accountability is to be promoted it must therefore be done in a way that takes into consideration the unique contexts and backgrounds of all held accountable, as well as being devoid of sanctions so severe that poor performance will be masked. This is because if learner poor performance is to be

addressed it has to be brought to the light of day so as to root out its causes, in particular if such causes have their roots in issues of social injustices as Adams and Bell (2016) as well as Young (2000) argue that social justice issues can never be fought in the dark.

#### **2.4.5 Localised Learner Poor Performance: A South African Perspective**

Turning my attention now to learner poor performance in a more localised context, that is, the context of South Africa, a study conducted by Bayat, Louw and Rena (2014) is of relevance to my study because similarly to my study, it focused on learner performance in South African secondary schools. Bayat *et al* (2014) asserted that post 1994 the education system was earmarked for fundamental change. This was since the South African schooling system prior to 1994 had separate schools for White and Black learners which not only symbolised but also gave harsh expression to the racial discrimination and inequities that prevailed in the country. Despite the many positive changes within the education system, including improved quality of, and access to, education for the previously disadvantaged groups, Shindler and Fleisch (2007) as well as Bayat *et al.* (2014) contend that underperforming secondary schools in South Africa continue to face chronic problems with poor performance which often manifests itself in high rates of grade repetition. At this juncture it should be noted that in South Africa, an underperforming school is defined as a school failing to achieve a Grade 12 pass rate of more than 60% (Bayat *et al.*, 2014).

Bayat *et al* (2014) identified grade promotion at the lower grades as a major contributing factor to learner poor performance in the higher, school leaving grades. It was contended that, although grade failure is not a desirable practice, failing learners who underperform in the lower grades would likely result in better equipped learners entering the higher grades, thus reducing learner poor performance at the higher grades (Bayat *et al.*, 2014). However, the data produced in Bayat *et al's* (2014) study suggested that because of the increased pressure placed on schools' resources by grade failing as well as the poor reputation associated with a high failure rate, many schools, where they could (in particular at the lower grades) opted for grade promotion. These findings appear to correlate with Sim's (2012) claim that schools are reluctant to fail learners and turn out poor results, and will therefore avoid this where possible, merely to save face. However, as is evident in Bayat *et al's* (2014) study the results of such practices prove detrimental in the long term for learners as poor academic performance and the reflection thereof becomes inevitable at the higher grades



where the Department of Basic Education oversees learner assessments more stringently. Thus, grade promotion, although favourable for the reputation of schools in the lower grades, has far reaching adverse implications for learner performance in the higher grades.

#### **2.4.6 Social Injustices, Race and Gender Associations with Learner Poor Performance**

An anomaly observed by Bayat *et al* (2014), in their analysis of their data, was that despite the fact that learner poor performance appeared most common amongst learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds, “coloured<sup>1</sup>” learners appeared to experience more multiple grade repetitions than “African<sup>2</sup>” learners. A reason suggested for such an anomaly was proffered in earlier work by Salo (2005) who claimed that “coloured” learners have a poorer perception of the importance of schooling and education when compared to “African” learners. It should be noted that most of the learners who participated in my study would fall into the apartheid era label of being so called “coloured.” Bayat *et al* (2014) claim that this poorer perception of the importance of schooling displayed by “coloured learners;” can be largely attributed to the social contexts in which such learners are raised. The contexts to which Bayat *et al* (2014) refer are contexts in which teenaged pregnancy and gang related activities are common place, thus severely limiting one’s perceptions of the future self. At this point, I feel it necessary to highlight the close correlation between the limiting of one’s perception of one’s future and the limiting of one’s imagining of success by contextual constraints and regular experiences, to which Hones (2011) makes reference in my study’s section on imagination. Thus, once again Vinz’s (1997) claim that embedded meanings need to be dislodged when attempting to free one’s mind through imagination, receives support even in literature related to learner poor performance as opposed to literature related to learner imagination.

Concerning the relationship of gender to learner performance, Bayat *et al* (2014) observed that female learners tended to attain greater academic success than male learners. This occurrence was particularly evident in poorer, underperforming schools which catered for the marginalised in society. Gustafsson (2011) offered two reasons for the large discrepancy in learner performance observed between male and female learners in poorer schools. One

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<sup>1</sup> In South Africa “coloured” is the name given to an ethnic group composed primarily of persons of mixed race.

<sup>2</sup> In South Africa “African” is the name given to people of black, native ethnicity. Used more commonly under the apartheid regime.

reason was the domestic responsibility for girls and the other reason was the “macho” culture to which boys were exposed. Gustafsson (2011) suggested that many girls growing up in poor socioeconomic conditions were burdened with domestic responsibilities from a younger age, thus a greater sense of responsibility was instilled in them. This sense of responsibility, argued Gustafsson (2011) often got transferred onto their attitudes towards schooling and education. However, despite their performing academically better than their male counterparts, Bayat *et al* (2014) contend that girls burdened with these domestic responsibilities nevertheless perform more poorly than they would have, had they not been distracted by domestic responsibilities. Thus, one sees that the sense of responsibility associated with domestic chores prevalent in respect of girls in poorer socioeconomic households results in their attaining greater academic success than boys in similar households, but nevertheless hinders these girls academic performance to a degree. Wealthier South African households often employ domestic assistance, while people living in poorer economic conditions are not in a position to do so. Thus, Freire’s (1996) claim that social injustices trap the marginalised in an already oppressive structure appears to resonate in Bayat *et al*’s (2014) reasoning behind why female learners’ attainment of academic success, although boosted by domestic responsibilities, nevertheless remains somewhat hindered when compared to females from wealthier households.

In regards to the macho culture to which boys from poorer socioeconomic conditions were exposed and what effect it had on their academic performance, Gustafsson (2011) contended that the effect was an adverse one. This macho culture to which Gustafsson (2011) refers finds expression in deviant and aggressive behaviour which often promotes anti-intellectualism. The result of such expression, argues Bayat *et al* (2014) is that boys who deviate from this perceived norm are ostracised and bullied. They, thus give in to the pressures prevalent in the contexts in which they are being raised and educated. Relating this back to issues of social injustice and how injustices may influence learners’ academic performance, it should be noted that Horowitz (1997) contends that often out of fear of being bullied and ostracised for not conforming to perceived norms males adopt a macho attitude. It thus appears as though Sim’s (2012) claim that schools fear bad reputations amongst their immediate communities, and so engage in practices to avoid such reputations, has a striking similarity to Horowitz’s (1997) and Bayat *et al*’s (2014) claims concerning boys from poorer socio economic communities engaging in practices to avoid a poor reputation. Notably, just as the school’s practices to avoid a poor reputation often resulted in the perpetuation of

learner poor performance, so too do these boys' practices result in the lessening of their chances of achieving academic success, and so perpetuates and exacerbates their poor academic performance. Given that these observations are shown to be prevalent in respect of boys from poorer socio economic conditions a relationship between learner poor performance and social injustices cannot be denied.

#### **2.4.7 Paving the Way for Social Justice in Closing the Achievement Gap in Learner Performance**

The achievement gap is a term used to refer to the difference in learner academic performance often associated with differences in social class, gender and ethnicity (Goodman and Burton, 2012). Such gap has been alluded to above; I thus think it necessary at this point to focus my attention on possible ways of addressing the achievement gap as highlighted in literature concerning learner performance. Addressing this gap remains a major obstacle in promoting a socially just society through education (Stephens, Hamedani & Destin, 2014). Stephens *et al* (2014) proffer that addressing the achievement gap is essential in combating social injustices as schools operate as engines of social mobility. However, it has long been argued that inequality in education often arises through a system which is tailored to benefit the white middle-class (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). These systems of education are designed such that they are easily accessible to, and well understood by, the so called "white middle class" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Thus, achievement gaps are perpetuated and exacerbated by such systems of education, accordingly rendering the attainment of a socially just society through education all the more difficult.

Despite the favouring of the white middle class by many an education system, within a South African context at present a growing black middle class is evident (Bloch, 2009; Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Thus, South Africa appears to experience achievement gaps not only on the basis of ethnicity but also on the basis of social class as those who understand the inner workings of the education system and are able to access better schooling facilities tend to achieve greater academic success (Bloch, 2009; Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Addressing the achievement gap, and so aiding the attainment of a socially just society would thus require an education system which can also be easily understood by the working class and even impoverished. This would then place these groups in a position similar to their middle class counterparts, that is to say, a position in which they too may use the education system to

their advantage. Thus, our present education system requires transformation so as to enable schools to; as Stephens *et al* (2014) put it, operate as engines of social mobility in achieving a socially just society. If the education system is not transformed in this manner Goodman and Burton (2012) argue that rather than schools operating as engines of social mobility they will rather serve to cause social mobility to remain static. This need for transformation of an already existing system as a possible way to address the achievement gap would undoubtedly find support in the work of Freire (1996) where he calls for structural transformation rather than expecting those who fall victim to the structure to themselves be transformed.

#### **2.4.8 Accountability with Support for Learner Poor Performance**

On the point of transforming an already existent structure, in this case the education system itself, I feel it incumbent at this juncture to focus my attention on the support given to those within the system to aid transformation. The need for support, rather than leaping at mere accountability as was noted by Sims (2013) in the instance of the USA would tend to be in line with Spaul's (2011) criticism of demanding accountability without providing the requisite support. In 2012 Spaul noted that the relationship between many principals and School Management Teams (SMTs) in respect of underperforming schools was tense at best and dysfunctional at worst. Thus, the very points of immediate support for teachers attempting to effect change and so improve learner performance are problematic. Such a claim was supported by Bayat *et al* (2014) who arrived at similar conclusions concerning relationships between SMTs and principals in their study. Bayat *et al* (2014) went on to assert that a lack of support from leadership and organisational structures has a profoundly negative impact on learner performance and in the broader sense, school performance.

To highlight some of the problems experienced at what I call immediate points of support, with such points referring to localised support accessible within schools, I turn now to some of the common criticisms of SMTs, principals and School Governing Bodies (SGBs) emerging in literature. Many SMTs claim that principals in underperforming schools are weak leaders who are afraid to discipline learners, and as such this lack of discipline spills into the classrooms making it difficult for teaching and learning to take place (Bayat *et al*, 2014). While many teachers claim that SMTs in underperforming schools seldom call meetings and when they do the meetings become a mere talk session yielding very little if any solutions to problems raised. In the midst of these criticisms levelled against

management, ironically both principals and SMTs in underperforming schools tend to claim that the teachers themselves are largely uninterested in learner performance and tend to display high absenteeism rates (Bayat *et al*, 2014). In light of the prevailing circumstances highlighted above, which constitute the very circumstances under which learners are expected to perform academically, it is not surprising then, that schools riddled with these problems, which according to Spaul and Taylor (2012) constitute 75% of South African government schools, experience an overabundance of learner poor performance. Support, since clearly lacking at the immediate points, should therefore in my opinion be sought externally, otherwise merely holding these stakeholders accountable, as was attempted in the USA in the 1990's would undoubtedly yield little if any results in respect of improving learners' and schools' academic performances.

#### **2.4.9 External Support for Learner Poor Performance (Closing the Achievement Gap)**

I now turn my attention to external support provided to both learners and schools who find themselves trapped in a web of continuing poor academic performance. Alexander, Schallert and Reynolds (2009) argued that when it comes to learner poor performance in government schools, indeed governments have both a right and a duty to intervene.

Many governments attempt to intervene and “offer support” in the only way that they know how, and that is through policy. Alexander *et al* (2009) highlight that one of the most influential policies to date, in the UK, is “Every Child Matters” (ECM). The policy of ECM, rather than merely focusing on academic performance, focuses on child welfare as a whole, so as to achieve social justice in respect of learners and accordingly eradicate the achievement gap which is arguably fuelled by prevailing circumstances of social injustices. However, just as Morrow (2007) famously highlighted the large discrepancy between policy and practice within a South African context, Goodman and Burton (2012) criticised the UK policy of ECM on similar grounds, claiming that the UK government had focused too heavily on designing an attractive policy on paper while ignoring practicalities of implementation in actual classroom settings. Goodman and Burton (2012) thus contended that a lack of continuity between policy and practice would ultimately result in policies achieving little if any positive results in addressing the achievement gap between the privileged and disadvantaged learners.

Within the context of South Africa, external support for learner poor performance in the form of policies have largely been criticised as being inappropriate (Bayat, *et al*, 2014). An example of inappropriate policies in the context of South Africa would be the one stating that learners can only be held back once per educational phase. Such policy is regarded as being inappropriate for the purposes of improving learner academic performance as it leaves schools with no alternative but to promote learners to the next grade without having adequately mastered the content knowledge of their current grade simply because a learner may have already repeated a grade in their current particular phase. Bayat *et al* (2014) contend that the end result of the implementation of such a policy is catastrophic as learners who have simply been promoted due to policy find themselves in the senior, school leaving phase ill-equipped to deal with the content of such phase. Accordingly, a low matric pass rate abounds, often times placing schools well below the level of a 60% matric pass rate, effectively resulting in schools with such occurrences being categorised as underperforming schools. Spaul (2011) criticises such categorisation arguing that it tends to demotivate both staff and learners at these schools, and such demotivation through categorisation often perpetuates learner poor performance. The need to divorce oneself, and in particular one's mind from the material realities that limit one's perceived potential as proposed by Deleuze (1994) is thus validated through Spaul's (2011) criticism of school categorisation.

#### **2.4.10 Concluding Remarks on External Support for Learner Poor Performance**

Bearing in mind Freire's (1996) call for structural transformation so as to accommodate the marginalised of society, it would appear, from the above, that both locally and abroad governments attempt to aid transformation through policy. They do this in a desperate attempt to close the achievement gap which exists between the privileged and the marginalised of society. However, their attempts yield little results as policy designed to aid learner performance remains divorced from the contextual realities of classrooms, for instance having to cater for multiple groups of diversity is seldom considered. In addition, within the South African context where policy is in place to advance phase promotion, it appears as though such policy is largely inappropriate in regards to improving learner performance. It thus serves to save face in the lower grades but ultimately results in schools that cater for the senior, school leaving phase achieving a matric pass rate which dooms them to categorisation as an underperforming school.

To date, poor academic performance by learners remains a major problem in South African schools. The success of intervention strategies that were aimed at turning the situation around in dysfunctional schools have been short lived and given the shortcomings of policy as mentioned above, are not sustainable in the country despite the fact that South Africa spends a major portion of its budget on education (Bayat *et al*, 2014). Thus, investment in more sustainable intervention strategies to combat learner poor performance appears to be necessitated. It is this issue of sustainability in intervention strategies to which my attention will now shift in the following section.

#### **2.4.11 Sustainability as a Long Term Curbing of Learner Poor Performance**

A long term solution to the problem of a poor education system may lie in sustainability which appears to have received increased attention in recent times (Hofmeyr and Nyoka, 2013). Thus one is taken back to Hofmeyr and Nyoka's (2013) call for intergenerational equity in an attempt to render a space socially just as the need for present generations needs to be met without compromising opportunities for future generations becomes apparent when attempting to improve the education system in a sustainable manner so as to ultimately improve learner academic performance. Meanwhile, and in the immediate future, the requirements of intergenerational equity, according to Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) entail a balancing of the human attributes of conditional co-operator and altruistic punisher. This is largely because with intergenerational equity each generation inherits a wealth of pecuniary and non-pecuniary resources. In return the generation is obliged to maintain and augment these resources for bequeathing them to the generations that follow. Accordingly, sustainability in respect of improved resources for promoting academic success must be promoted.

Based on the above, it would thus be pointless from a sustainability perspective to provide current generations with all the requisite resources for academic success if they will not use them responsibly and in a manner that increases the likelihood of future generations also being in a position to benefit from them. Often improvements, albeit minor ones, have indeed been made in poorer schools only for them to be both abused and neglected by both staff and learners (Bloch, 2009; Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Accordingly, accountability on the part of not just education officials, but also those marginalised beings using the very limited resources, must be promoted. The need for all stakeholders to take responsibility for

sustainability may then ultimately lead to improved learner performance not just in the present but also in the long term as undoubtedly improved and maintained resources will enhance one's chances of obtaining greater academic success. The relevance of redistributive justice as highlighted by Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) is thus apparent. This is because such a notion calls for partnerships amongst multiple generations which naturally demands accountability on the part of each generation so as to ensure the availability of resources for future generations. Thus, taking responsibility by all stakeholders for sustainability in education, as suggested by Bloch (2009) would certainly find support in the work of Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) through their notion of redistributive justice.

## **2.5 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter I remained cognisant of my research questions. In essence to address the research question of “what are learners’ experiences of social injustices?” the work of authors such as Bloch (2009), Freire (1996), Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) as well as Gynther (2009) amongst others were of relevance. This is because they each, to some degree speak of contexts in which learners may be educated. Some of them make specific reference to social justice in spaces of learning as well as the lack thereof. To this end the work of these authors proved useful in relation to my second research question, being that of “how spaces of social injustice may influence learners’ imaginations.”

In respect of the notion of imagination the writings of Deleuze (1994), Vinz (1997) and Gough (2004) amongst others were relied upon. Thus, an overlap in reliance on some literature existed across my second, third and fourth research questions as each of these made some mention of imagination. My third research question was that of how imaginings of success influence learner performance. While research question four was focussed on why have these imaginings influenced performance in the way in which they have. In respect of learner performance the work of Sims (2013), Spaul (2013) as well as Bayat *et al* (2014) amongst many others applied. In addition to the notions of imagination and learner poor performance running throughout my study, another overarching notion was that of social justice. Hence, the work of key authors such as Freire (1996), Young (2000), Bell (1997), Ramphela (2008) and Adams and Bell (2016) had to be utilised.



Throughout this chapter I attempted to draw and highlight links amongst learners' experiences of social injustices, imaginings of success as well as learner academic performance. I did this as these constituted the focus of my study as well as formed the basis for my research questions. In my next chapter I focus more specifically on the work of Deleuze (1994) as I rely heavily on his work to constitute the theoretical framework of my study.

## Chapter Three

### Framing Imagination

#### 3.1 Introduction

My study was framed by a somewhat old theory, being that of Deleuze's (1994) theory of imagination which ultimately centers on taking one to the border of one's knowledge; a point at which ignorance and knowledge are claimed, by Deleuze (1994), to merge. One of my reasons for opting for an older theory was simply because, after reading some of the works of Gough (2004) and Drohan (2010) concerning imagination, I came to the realisation that both of those authors, as relevant to my study as their theories were, seemed to ground much of their writing in Deleuze's (1994) earlier theory of imagination. I therefore felt it would be more appropriate for me to rely on the initial source when framing my study.

In addition to my reasons expressed above, going back to the theory of imagination in an earlier form allowed me access to a theory absent of constraints applied by later authors. I will allude to these constraints in this chapter. Nevertheless, I also found that Deleuze's (1994) earlier theory, when merged with Freire's (1996) theory on liberation and structural transformation formed an adaptation of theories which fitted my study. Without this merging of theories it may not have been possible for me to construct my elliptic theory on imagination, which I explain in great detail in chapter seven of my study.

In this chapter I place a greater focus on Deleuze's (1994) theory than that of Freire (1996) because one of the phenomena under focus in my study is learners' imaginings of success. There are other phenomena such as learners' experiences of social injustices and poor performance, however, learners' imaginings of success remained fundamental to developing my theory on imagination. With that said, liberation does, however, present as a consequence of imagining, as I will argue in chapter seven, being my theorising chapter. I will therefore, in this chapter, argue for the appropriateness of Deleuze's (1994) theory of imagination in my

study. Some of the constructs of this theory will be described, such as merging of ideas and meaning-making, imaginative attitudes and realistic imaginings amongst others.

The usefulness of the selected constructs (selected from Deleuze's theory) to my study will be identified, explained and justified. Throughout my study constant reference will be made to Deleuze's (1994) theory to the extent that the presence of his theory will be difficult to ignore. My reason for doing this is because my study was fundamentally about using imagination to help transcend instances of social injustices. I would therefore have been remiss were I to allow myself or even the reader, for that matter, to forget the significance of Deleuze's (1994) theory in respect of my study.

In addition, I will show how other authors have used Deleuze's theory on imagination while alluding to short-comings of his theory. I will nevertheless explain how I have attempted to overcome these short-comings in my application of Deleuze's theory to my study. Much of the short-comings, I will show, can be overcome in my study by combining Deleuze's (1994) theory with Freire's (1996) theory on liberation, as this way, a theory on imagination is forced into the realms of social justice. I will therefore also demonstrate just how constructs of Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination and Freire's (1996) theory concerning liberation and structural transformation may be merged to provide a theoretical framework deemed most appropriate to my study. To contextualise my use of Deleuze's (1994) theory, I commence this chapter with a brief background into how I came to discover Deleuze's work.

### **3.2.1 How my Interests and my Study led to Finding Deleuze**

Time travel and space have fascinated me for as long as I can remember. However, our galaxy, the universe, the idea of multi-verses and even the cosmos have recently captured my attention. The idea that a single particle can exist in multiple spaces at the same time, as argued by Hawking (1975), particularly fascinated me as I was able to see a direct link between his argument and my study. The link simply being that one's imagination may be both close to and far from one's reality, while it remains an imagination by the same individual being. To make sense of Hawking's (1975) argument concerning particles

existing in multiple spaces, quantum mechanics was introduced into the scientific community (Hawking, 1975).

I am not a scientist, and I do not propose to be one. Yet, still my fascination overwhelms me. Having spent several years involved in social justice education, appropriately perhaps, inequality, unfairness and a lack of justice are the somewhat more mainstream and down to earth issues that capture my attention. Nevertheless, I, when engaging in my study, although not explicitly written down, used Hawking's (1975) reasoning to assist me in wrapping my head around the idea that perhaps one's imagining can be both close to and far from reality (this will be elaborated on in chapter seven). I only mention this here so that the reader may gain some insight into why Deleuze's (1994) work may have been appealing to me, despite my fascination with Hawking. In essence, Deleuze's (1994) work appealed to me because he, just like Hawking (1975) sought ways of combining and merging things that otherwise would not be merged. Also, given that my study does not belong in the sciences, but rather the social sciences, I felt that the work of Deleuze (1994) was certainly more appropriate for my study.

This chapter is therefore centred on Gilles Deleuze and how his work, relates to, and has shaped and influenced, my study. One of the striking characteristics of Deleuze's (1994) work is his tendency to merge ideas that otherwise would not ordinarily be merged. I therefore when reading the work of Deleuze (1994) and considering my interests in Hawking (1975) remained open to merging what may not ordinarily be merged. Accordingly, from the outset of my study, I saw no reason why I should not attempt to merge imagination with, perhaps everyday experiences of social injustices, and so use imagination to aid one in paving a way forward to achieving success.

With Deleuze (1994) constantly in mind, the merging to which I allude above, would likely transcend experiences and so liberate a largely disadvantaged and even marginalised group. Logically then, having framed my study with Deleuze's (1994) theory of imagination, what has come into focus in my study, as far as findings are concerned, are those surrounding

learners' experiences of social injustices and their relation to learner poor performance as well as these learners' imaginings of success.

Being a Geographer at heart and somewhat of an individual with an animated imagination, I initially desired to make space and imagination the two foci of my thesis. The merging of imagination and space, which are generally worlds apart, had already been attempted by Noel Gough. Gough (2004) attempted to employ fictional texts so as to assist one in escaping one's contextual constraints. He found that in so doing, one's mind was freed from the constraints of one's immediate environment. Upon reading his works I came to realise that much of what is stated by him stemmed from the work of Deleuze. In particular, theories on imagination which later became a more central focus of my study than space, seemed to be prevalent in the work of Deleuze (1994). It was in this manner that I was introduced to the work of Deleuze. I then eventually found Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination which influenced my study in relation to how I made sense of literature which I consulted and data which I analysed.

In my study I have attempted to explain the phenomena of learner performance, learner imagination and socially unjust spaces. Relying on the work of theorists such as Bloch (2009), Spaul (2013) and Deleuze (1994) amongst others, I was able to demonstrate a link amongst the phenomena as well as isolate key constructs pertaining directly to each of the mentioned phenomena. I was then able to elevate those key constructs to influence the way I analysed and used the data in my study.

My study takes place within the context of social injustices. However, noting the converse, social justice, according to Bell (1997) is both an ideal and a goal. Young (2000) has argued that completely socially just spaces are non-existent as they remain a part of this ideal and goal. I was thus inclined, in my study, to rather call on learners to simply imagine performing in socially just settings of teaching and learning, so as to aid the attainment of success. When attempting to free the mind so as to explore all possible solutions to a problem (in the instance of my study the problem being learner poor performance) I relied on the work of Vinz (1997) who highlighted the need to dislodge embedded meanings and

averred that imagining can be taken as a sort of science fiction. More importantly, for the purposes of this chapter, I relied heavily on Deleuze's (1994) claims that imagining aids the freeing of one's mind and opens up the possibility to push the boundaries of knowledge (To aid in freeing learners' minds of contextual constraints, I use imaginative narratives, as will be explained in my methodology, chapter four.). Such a claim concerning the freeing of one's mind tends to support the work of Vinz (1997) since imagination is argued to aid one in the dislodging of embedded meanings. In the case of my study I wished for the learners, who constituted the participants in my study, to be freed from what they previously knew about their performance based on experiences of repeated poor performance. I therefore wished for them to simply imagine an ideal in which success in respect of their performance suddenly becomes a great possibility. Hence, the significance of Deleuze's (1994) and Vinz's (1997) claims surrounding imagination became undeniable in my study. Accordingly, the use of Deleuze's (1994) theory of imagination emerged as being most appropriate for the framing of my study. It was only during analysing the data in my study that I began to realise that liberation emerged as a consequence of imagination for the learners in my study. I therefore, upon this realisation, decided to merge the theories of Deleuze and Freire to more appropriately frame my study.

### **3.2.2 Introducing Deleuze**

Gilles Deleuze was a French philosopher who wrote influentially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century around metaphysical meaning making which spanned multiple fields, and so his influence was not just limited to the social sciences. His most popular works were the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), both of which were co-written with Felix Guattari (Drohan, 2010).

Drohan (2010) used Deleuze's (1994) theory to make sense of thoughts that are both formless and invisible as well as those having form. He ultimately noted that through using Deleuze's (1994) theory he was able to mark a movement from thoughts without form towards those with form. Drohan (2010) noted that Deleuze himself admitted to being a philosophic collage artist. Deleuze's philosophic works are mixtures of concepts drawn from fine arts,

music, literature, history and innumerable other sources (Drohan, 2010). Deleuze had a tendency, when analysing the works of others, to cut away parts of their assemblages and then proceed to stick them together in new ways. So he synthesised to the degree of what is known as “philosophic collage-making.” A result of this process is the merging of ideas, theories and concepts that otherwise may not have been merged. Deleuze does more than draw comparisons, but rather forms collages of other’s arguments in a way that evokes a sight of coherence in the linking of the arguments (Drohan, 2010). Drohan (2010) therefore found Deleuze’s work invaluable when attempting to link multiple arguments to give thought some form. In my study, I use Deleuze’s (1994) theory in a similar way in that I, through imagination, merge present realities with the possibility of a future reality in which liberation of an oppressed group of learners is possible.

Deleuze has also been described as a “Spinozist” in that he borrowed parts of Spinoza’s ontology and epistemology and grafted them onto his own material realism (Osborne, 2003). Spinoza focused on substance while, Deleuze, however, equated the material realism of his universe with Spinoza’s substance or “God” to create a philosophic conjunction at which point his reality and that of Spinoza were merged (Osborne, 2003). In doing this Deleuze often had to shift from his already existent existential analysis of phenomenon towards a concept that was consistent with Spinoza. Accordingly Deleuze was confronted with the realisation that meaning making can be restricted by one’s already existing knowledge or attitudes. I therefore, in my study, construct a link between Deleuze’s (1994) work and Vinz’s (1997) call for the dislodging of embedded meanings to assist one in achieving a shift in axiology which may otherwise have not so easily been achieved. Deleuze’s (1994) desire to merge multiple realities is done in an attempt to overcome restriction on thought, understanding and meaning-making (Osborne, 2003). In my study I have attempted to merge realities based on experience with desires based on imagination. Hence, Deleuze’s (1994) work was invaluable in the theoretical framing of my study.

### **3.2.3 Using Quantum Mechanics to Explain Deleuze's Theory and How I Applied It in My Study**

Quantum mechanics can be defined as the study of small particles (Hawking, 1975). Particles, in the discipline of quantum mechanics are acknowledged as also being waves (Hawking, 1975). The significance of this is that waves, unlike particles have the ability to be in multiple places at the same time. Human beings are made up of particles (Hawking, 1975). A logical inference would therefore be that we too then have the ability to be in multiple places at the same time.

Ordinarily people within the discipline of social sciences would find themselves tempted to reject the inference expressed above because we may never have experienced such a phenomenon. However, it is in this knee-jerk-reaction of rejection that the work of Deleuze (1994) is of significance. This is because even if we insist on rejecting the inference, it is doubtful that we may be against imagining an alternate reality which may very well exist in a parallel universe. So an imagined possibility could very easily be a reality in another place, or perhaps another structure. Deleuze (1994) uses imagination to merge what is known through experience, and what one may not know, having never experienced it. It is Freire (1970) who suggested structural transformation so as to accommodate the marginalised in society. However, a startling question would have to be “transformation from what; and to what?” Imagining a structure that may be conducive to the success of the marginalised then begins to seem plausible as Deleuze (1994) contends that imagining may pave the way forward to eventually make the imagining a reality.

Based on the paragraph above, the question of “transformation to what?” becomes answered with whatever the imagined conditions or structure is to pave the way to success. Thus, the logic behind quantum mechanics appears to be applicable in my study and in line with Deleuze's (1994) logic concerning imagination, in that an idea that may initially be rejected because it has never been experienced, could very well become a reality. All that is therefore required is imagination to aid in paving the way towards this reality being accepted as a truth. In the instance of my study, those marginalised learners, who are indeed willing to imagine a



way forward, possibly through structural transformation, would likely find this imagining eventually resulting in their transcendence of limitations which are inherent in their everyday experiences. Undoubtedly, then, the marginalised would become liberated, but not without the use of imagination to begin to open one's mind to possibilities of success despite experience.

Based on the above, it is not surprising then that my study relies heavily on Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination. Very simply put, Deleuze's (1994) theory can be stated as follows: when one imagines, one is forced to operate at the border of what is known from experience and what is unknown, because it was never experienced. Operating at this border for long enough; argues Deleuze (1994) causes the line between the known and the unknown to blur and so eventually the unknown becomes the known. This blurring happens as one's mind is then freed of, as Vinz (1997) proffers, deeply embedded understandings which have been embedded through experience. The possibility to move freely between two opposites and perhaps even merge these two, which ordinarily may not have been merged, is accordingly evoked through the use of imagination (Deleuze, 1994).

Thus, whatever one has imagined, be it academic success in the case of my study, will, based on Deleuze's (1994) theory, no longer be unknown and unattainable, but will instead become part of the known. Achieving what is known no longer seems so far removed from one's everyday reality, as the achievement of what is unknown does. Accordingly, just as the idea of existing in multiple places at the same time as quantum mechanics suggests, may initially be rejected until the mind is freed to grasp something that may never before have been experienced, so too may the possibility of achieving academic success be grasped by the learners in my study as a real possibility despite having never experienced it. It was therefore my intention in my study to use Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination to assist in freeing the minds of the learners in my study from limitations which were likely embedded due to a constant exposure of conditions of social injustices.

### **3.3.1 Deleuze's Merging of Ideas With Respect To Meaning-Making**

With respect to meaning-making Deleuze (1994) argues that signs possess an existential compulsion which may arise at any time. It is because of this compulsion that signs exceed the initial meaning that one may ascribe to them. Deleuze (1994) justifies this claim by suggesting that despite whatever preconceived understandings we may have of a sign which appears before us we never know its full significance and so we begin to search it. However, the sign exceeds the initial meaning we ascribe to it because the sign itself engenders the very search for its meaning, and even after the meanings are discovered there is nothing to stop a sign from continuing to sign (Deleuze, 1994).

What is described above is a classic Deleuzian instance of merging what may otherwise not have been merged. In this case the existential nature or compulsion of a sign is merged with an empirical albeit Spinozist analysis which is eventually exceeded because of the existential nature or compulsion of a sign. In my study, when one begins to imagine attaining academic success, existentially each individual participant had the ability to begin through their imaginations to describe multiple ways of paving a way towards the ultimate attainment of success. Thus, in a Deleuzian fashion, the imagining of success became merged with multiple possible ways of attaining it. These ways of attaining success will be described when the data is presented in my study in chapters five and six. I have, however, made mention of it here to demonstrate to the reader just how Deleuze's (1994) ways of reasoning which feed into his ultimate theory of imagination assisted tremendously in the framing of my study, even as far as data dissemination and analyses were concerned.

### **3.3.2 Deleuze on Imaginative Attitudes**

When making sense of Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination his ideas concerning imaginative attitudes should also be noted because his insistence on a realistic imaginative attitude proves fundamental to my *elliptic theory of imagination*. Deleuze (1994) argues that if actions and thoughts or imaginings were not differentiated then the universe would remain

an amorphous totality. I interpret this as Deleuze's way of reminding one to imagine freely, yet maintain with a free imagination some degree of realism. This is because Deleuze (1994) admits that in reality, not all thoughts, or imaginings can be put into actions. Nevertheless, in my study I relied heavily on the imaginings of those marginalised to plot out an imagining of a way forward towards success. However, bearing in mind Deleuze's (1994) proposition concerning imaginative attitudes, I had to remain mindful of limitations inherent in turning imaginings into realities. Naturally such limitations were often associated with repeated exposure to social injustices.

Deleuze (1994) himself argued that differentiating between actions and imagination brought a finite element into the process of dematerialising. He suggested that this was because many people learn through repetition of concrete, material experiences, and that our actions, however well imagined, are never entirely divorced from the material reality. In my study, Deleuze's (1994) suggestion above was relevant as the marginalised learners had likely experienced repetitively social injustices and perhaps even poor academic performance. Thus, expecting to come up with a solution that eliminates social injustice and poor performance in their entirety would have been largely unrealistic on my part, especially given that I relied on Deleuze's (1994) theory to frame my study. Nevertheless, in accordance with Deleuze (1994), the ability to imagine on the part of the learners did, to a great degree, free them from many of the restraints inherent in their repeated experiences of social injustices and learner poor performance.

My desire to facilitate the imagining of a way forward and towards transcending circumstances to achieve success, but to do so realistically, was only achievable through the use of Deleuze's (1994) understandings and interpretations of imagining. In essence, bearing in mind Deleuze's (1994) ideas, the imaginative attitudes on the part of the learners had to remain realistic, otherwise, Deleuze (1994) warns, their imaginings may not have been achievable and as such the blurring of the line between the known and the unknown serves no purpose. Thus, I was influenced in my study, to seek imaginings which remained realistic when considering the materialism to which the participants in my study were, and had been, exposed. Very closely related to imaginative attitudes, is the accuracy of imaginings, which will now be discussed under the succeeding heading in this chapter.

### 3.3.3 Deleuze on the Accuracy of Imaginings

Imaginings tend to guide one's actions with varying degrees of success. Imaginings can often lead to success in finding solutions to problems, but may also cause dangerous miscalculations (Deleuze, 1994). With respect to the resulting success of imaginings and their accuracy, people have a tendency to swing between two poles. At the one pole imaginings are determined by voluntary control in that what we imagine is what we wish to imagine and is in no way determined by what is present before us (Deleuze, 1994). Viewed in this manner we may achieve a trivial form of success as we simply imagine whatever we may desire. However, at the other pole the element of accuracy in imaginings is introduced in that what we imagine is influenced by, and related to, what is present around us (Deleuze, 1994).

To me the two poles, described above, merely represent the merging of experiences and desires as expressed under the heading preceding this one, but with an action of adding accuracy or rather a sense of realist imagining. Accordingly, the resulting desire or dematerial state of transcendence is moderated to a degree by what is present before one. Thus, Deleuze's (1994) desire for a realistic imaginative attitude is supported by his introduction of accuracy in imagining. In essence, I am inclined to contend that a realistic imaginative attitude and accuracy in imagining go hand in hand as one cannot exist without the other. Taking the two to go hand in hand helped make Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination more applicable and relevant to my study as I too relied on both realistic and accurate imaginings to help pave the way towards the attainment of academic success.

In further respect of my study; understanding imaginings in the manner expressed above, that is, understanding imaginings with a sense of accuracy, so to speak, indeed influenced my analysis of the data in my study. My analysis was influenced to the extent that the participants' desires were never entirely divorced from their experiences which were present before them and in an immaterial state. Accordingly, the vehicle for liberation which, in my study, was largely created by imagination was not allowed to become something that was so farfetched, especially for the marginalised, that it was almost impossible for them to ever

access. Otherwise, I felt, my entire study would have served little practical value for the ones whom I sought to liberate, by at the very least, giving a voice to their realities and imaginings of ways of transcendence.

Accuracy of imaginings proposed by Deleuze (1994) through its relation to what was present before one was of tremendous significance in my study as the material realities of the learners could not be ignored. Accordingly, through the application of Deleuze's (1994) notions of accuracy in imaginings and realistic imaginative attitudes to my study it became apparent that, as suggested by me, in the previous paragraph, these two notions could not be divorced from each other. Framing my study with Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagining thus ensured that the participants' imaginings remained both somewhat realistic and accurate, but nevertheless served as a vehicle for liberation.

### **3.3.4 A Dogma in the Ordinary Conception of Sensory Imagination and Deleuze**

Sixteen years after Deleuze introduced his theory on imagination Drohan (2010) used Deleuze's (1994) theory to address what he identified as a dogma in one's conception of sensory imagination. In essence, Drohan (2010) suggested that a too close comparison of imagining to perceptual experience and a too strong division between imagining and beliefs or desires constituted the two main sources of the dogma in the ordinary conception of imaginings. An implication inherent in this suggestion was that either way one wants to look at the dogma, imaginings remained restricted as being either too closely aligned with experience or too divorced from desires. In essence, experience and desires could never be merged. Accordingly, in the instance of my study, I too was faced with wondering how then does one begin to imagine success when experience is largely devoid of it? In addition, how does one imagine success, which is likely desired, when desires are divorced from imaginings?

It was in the midst of the conundrum mentioned above that the work of Deleuze (1994) became relevant to Drohan in 2010 and a few years later in my study. To understand this

conundrum one may visualise a spectrum with experience on the one extreme and desires on the other extreme. However, what remains in between is simply imagination, which according to Deleuze (1994) is stuck between the two. But Deleuze (1994) argued that imagination can nevertheless be freed if it merges the two extremes so that eventually these opposite understandings along with imagination become one collaged idea free to move about from one extreme to the next. I could not help but wonder if this free movement of imagination may even possess the potential to pave a way forward towards success, rather than being stagnated by being caught between two perceived opposites.

The relevance of Deleuze's (1994) theory was thus useful to Drohan (2010) because Deleuze (1994) offered imagination as a way of forcing one to operate at the border of what one knows from experience and what one does not know, yet desires. Deleuze (1994) went as far as arguing that through operating at this border for long enough, eventually the two previously "un-mergables" become merged. Drohan (2010) in realising that Deleuze's (1994) theory made it possible to merge experience and ideas through using imagination as a catalyst was then able to overcome the dogma in one's conception of sensory imagination. Accordingly, just as this new collage of merged ideas became free of constraint from two opposing forces, so too, in my study did I manage to free the movement between realities and imagined realities of the marginalised so as to ultimately pave the way forward towards success.

Drohan's (2010) idea to use Deleuze's (1994) theory to overcome what he (Drohan) described as a dogma in the ordinary conception of imagination thus influenced me in my study to view imagination as a sort of "go-between" in respect of the experiences of the participants and their ultimate desires for success despite their experiences. Using imagination in this manner, I was able to form a collage which merged the participant's experiences and their desires to form a single "free-moving" imagining which operated as a vehicle for liberation. This vehicle then gave voice to the experiences of the marginalised (however oppressive these experiences may have been) while also allowing the marginalised a platform from which to plot the way forward for their own transcendence of circumstances. The occurrence and process expressed above was triggered and merged by imagination.

The diagram below (figure 3.1) shows the process described above:

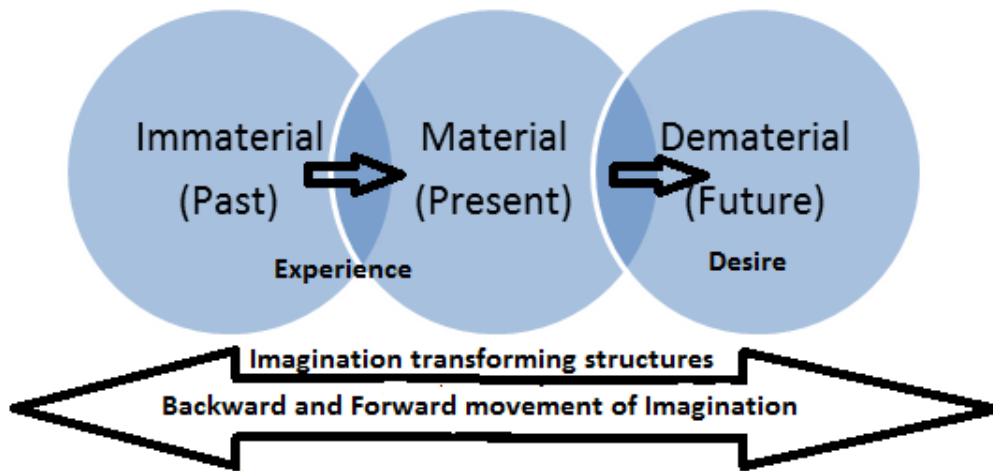


Figure 3.1

### 3.3.5 Deleuze and Rhizomes

Very seldom does one read Deleuze’s work without encountering Guatarri. Their writing regarding rhizomes influenced Deleuze’s (1994) theory on imagination to the extent that both imagination and rhizomatic thinking were viewed by Deleuze as a means by which ideas can be both free flowing and easily merged. In 1987 Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) created a new critical language for analysing thinking as flows across space. They relied on concepts such as “lines of flight” and more particularly in relation to my study, concepts such as “rhizome” and “rhizomatics” to theorise spatial relationships between ways of conceiving and making sense of the world around us.

Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) distinguished “rhizomatic” thinking from “arborescent” conceptions. With aborescent conceptions one is required to rely on vertical and linear connections of knowledge, often in a hierarchically articulated manner. The knowledge then stems from branches of a central stem or trunk rooted in firm foundations (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1987). Whereas, Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) argue that, rhizomatic thinking relies

on ceaselessly established connections often lacking in hierarchy. In addition the organisational structure of the root-tree system in which causality can be charted along chronological lines is, in their opinion, also lacking.

Umberto Eco (1997) later explained the rhizome to be so constructed that every path can be connected with every other one. Eco (1997) claimed that the rhizome has no centre, no periphery and no exit, because it is potentially infinite. The space of conjecture, Eco (1997) proffered, is a rhizome space. From this, I deduced that one of the implications of rhizome space is simply that our understandings of the world around us, however varying they may be, cannot be divorced from each other, and none can take hierarchy over another. The usefulness of Deleuze and Guatarri's (1987) rhizomatics in relation to narrative inquiry was relied on by Gough (2004) when he performed narrative experiments in educational inquiry by deploying imaginative reading and writing practices that he characterized as 'rhizosemiotic play'. In my study I asked learners to engage in the writing of imaginative narratives, hence this idea of rhizosemiotic play, stemming from the work of Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) and directly linked to Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination, was considered useful to me.

Given that rhizosemiotic play stemmed from Deleuze and Guatarri's (1987) concept of the rhizome, which primarily related to understandings and ideas being linked to each other with no particular hierarchy, logically Gough (2004) contended that rhizosemiotic play relates to constructing narratives in a similar way to how understandings are constructed in rhizome spaces. Gough (2004) used rhizosemiotic play to construct understandings with an imaginative aspect as it enabled free linking of understandings and ideas without any taking priority over another. Having firmly positioned my study within the critical paradigm it seemed logical for me to promote the construction and even expression of ideas in a way that detracted from having one idea or understanding take precedence or priority over another, as it is the very perpetuation of dominant realities which I wished to avoid so as to give a voice to those who may have previously been silenced.

Accordingly, in my study, just as Gough (2004) constructed understandings with an imaginative aspect in his narrative experiments, I too introduced the imaginative aspect of knowledge construction through the use of imaginative narratives. This enabled participants'



ideas to not only flow freely, but to also have them occur in such a manner that none took priority over another. Echoed in such an approach was Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination which aimed to have a free movement of imagination. Not surprising then, was Gough's (2004) rhizosemiotic play related to both Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) idea on rhizomes as well as Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination. These connections thus highlighted once again just how imperative it was that my study be framed by Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination.

The imaginative aspect of knowledge construction evoked through the use of imaginative narratives, in my study, not only acted as a "go between" experience and desire, as expressed in the previous section. The imaginative aspect did, however, also assist in linking all ideas and understandings so as to reflect how the world and experiences often do exist, albeit in a merged and rather messy way with multiple understandings and experiences often being dependant on each other. Hence, the learners' narratives, in my study, were written in a messy and interlinking way. Nevertheless, such an approach can find support in the work of Gough (2004) who contends that although realities exist beyond texts, often a reliable way of fathoming the realities of another is through texts themselves. It therefore seemed logical for me to present texts of marginalised individuals' narratives in this rhizomatic way as that is how the realities portrayed were likely experienced by them.

Based on my writings above, it is apparent that although I framed my study with Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination, I was also inclined to rely on other works. In particular, I relied on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) conception of Rhizomes when engaging in imaginative narrative enquiry, as well as Gough's (2004) rhizosemiotic play which has fundamental links to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) work as well as Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination. To exclude these conceptions, in my opinion, would have hindered the ability of my study to fathom and so liberate the realities of the previously marginalised. This is because without Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) as well as Gough's (2004) conceptions of rhizomes and rhizosemiotic play respectively, the realities of the participants in my study may not have been portrayed in a manner that showed all the links between and amongst experiences and imagination. Therefore, an inaccurate portrayal may have prevailed.

### **3.3.6 Deleuze's Merging of the Immaterial and Dematerial Through the Material**

Also feeding into Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination are his ideas concerning materialism, immaterialism and dematerialism. Deleuze (1994) speaks of "immaterialism" and "dematerialism," with materialism being a sort of "go between" the two. Drohan (2010) suggests that in understanding Deleuze's (1994) references to these and their relation to his existential interpretations of meaning making we must consider the material as being that which is already in existence. The immaterial must come before the material with the prefix "im" referring to going towards something. While the "dematerial" must come after the material with the prefix "de" referring to moving away from something (Drohan, 2010). Viewed in this manner, one can deduce that meaning making, when presented with signs, must begin by moving towards what is concrete, and likely known from our experiences. Our meaning-making must then move away from the concrete based on experiences, perhaps towards what is desired or imagined.

Relating Deleuze's (1994) understanding of meaning-making and materialism to my study, when collecting data, images were shown to learners of spaces within their school which acted as concrete signs of their learning and related performance (photo elicitation). In making meaning of them, learners began with the immaterial and so were moving towards what was concrete in their experiences. The experiences were experiences of injustices and poor performance. However, in keeping with Deleuze's (1994) desire to merge what usually is not merged, through imagination (the writing of imaginative narratives) these learners' meanings and understandings of their learning was eventually moved towards the "dematerial."

The "dematerial," in my study were represented by desires expressed through imagination. Thus, a steady movement away from the concrete "materialism" of learner poor performance and social injustice was facilitated through imagination. This process then enabled me, in my study, to fathom from learners' imaginations, an idea of a structure which is conducive to success in respect of learner academic performance. From the fathoming of this structure, I was then in a better position to understand how one may start working towards making this

imagined structure a reality. This process appeared to be in line with Freire's (1970) notion of structural transformation to aid the liberation of the oppressed and thus suited my study rather well.

Under the next two sub-headings I will explain just how some constructs of Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination were merged with constructs of Freire's (1996) theory on liberation and structural transformation. In particular, Deleuze's (1994) constructs of dematerial, material and immaterial will be merged with Freire's (1996) constructs of liberation and structural transformation. Also, Freire's (1996) constructs of critical thinking and substantive equality will be merged with Deleuze's (1994) constructs of borders of knowledge and merging realities.

### **3.4 Deleuze's Constructs**

#### **3.4.1 Constructs of Dematerial, Material, Immaterial, Liberation and Structural Transformation**

Movement towards the dematerial reality, which in essence could be viewed as a transformed structure, I would argue, becomes dependent on the merging of the material and immaterial realities (Rastovic, 2011). Nevertheless, movement both back and forth remains possible through the use of imagination which begins to act as a sort of vehicle for this movement. It becomes, in my view, difficult to ignore the fact that while Freire (1996) argues for structural transformation, Deleuze (1994) speaks of transforming structures of reality by use of imagination. In my study, as explained earlier I thus argue that imagination can indeed be used as a vehicle for liberation when the theories of both Freire (1996) and Deleuze (1994) are, in a Deleuzian style of thinking, merged. To clarify this movement and relationship, I refer once again to figure 3.1. I will later, in chapter seven, adapt this figure to help explain my elliptic theory of imagination.

Evidenced above with reference to figure 3.1 is the fact that one's reality or the structures of one's reality may indeed be transformed through the use of imagination. Where one's reality,

be it present reality (material) merged with past reality (immaterial) is riddled with instances of oppression and social injustice, to transcend these circumstances in accordance with the merging of Deleuze's (1994) theory with Freire's (1996) theory, imagination may be used to help transport one's thinking towards a future reality (dematerial), being a reality of liberation. The backward and forward movement of imagination, as seen in figure 3.1 makes it possible for one's past to merge with one's present which ultimately makes it possible for a desire to be awakened in one to transcend the culmination of past and present experiences of oppression to essentially move or transport one by use of imagination towards a future in which liberation is indeed possible, even if this future remains imagined.

In essence, the combining of Freire's (1996) theory with that of Deleuze (1994) makes it possible for imagination to act as a vehicle for liberation. This is because, when restricted to Deleuze's (1994) theory, imagination is just a vehicle moving across the immaterial, material and dematerial realities. However, once Freire's (1996) theory on liberation is introduced, this vehicle can then move from realities lacking liberation to one in which liberation does indeed exist. The possibility of one's understandings and thinking being transported towards a future reality, free from social injustices, then emerges.

Deleuze (1994) has argued that, desire, causes a back and forth flow especially when relationships can be found to exist in a linear and binary fashion, as depicted in figure 3.1 above. One, according to Deleuze (1994) is then able to sit at the border of what is known through experience and what may be imagined for infinite time. It is this notion of sitting and operating at this border to which I now turn under my next heading.

### **3.4.2 Constructs of: Borders of Knowledge, Merging Realities, Critical Thinking and Substantive Equality**

Operating at the border which separates what is known through experience from what is unknown but may be imagined is one of many key constructs in Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination. Deleuze (1994) argues that society constructs its own disordered state of mind

through recording in memory what may have already happened. In addition when drawing a bridge between theories of Freire (1996) and Deleuze (1994), I noted in my literature review that Deleuze's (1994) assertion that repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but rather changes something in the mind which contemplates it, serves to, to some degree, support Freire's (1996) argument that through repetition, indoctrination is often in operation.

From the above, it is thus apparent that repetition of experience; coupled with memories of experiences, possibly experiences of social injustices, only serve to create a body of knowledge which remains separated by a border from what has neither been experienced nor remembered. Indeed such experience resonates with the experiences of the learners in my study as they too repeatedly experienced social injustices and memories of such which formed a body of knowledge separated by a border from the reality they eventually imagined. Deleuze (1994) proffers that in order to traverse such a border one must, through the use of imagination, operate at the border for however long it takes for what is known to eventually merge with what is unknown, in other words what is an imagined reality. The writing of imaginative narratives, as explained in my methodology chapter, served to evoke such an occurrence in respect of the learners who participated in my study.

The merging of what is known with what is unknown is, to my mind, a truly Deleuzian notion as I have mentioned previously that Deleuze (1994) focuses much of his work on making possible the merging of what otherwise may never have been merged. I have, in my study, chosen to merge the work of Deleuze (1994) with that of Freire (1996) to assist in constructing my elliptic theory of imagination which indeed shows how imagination may be used to assist in attempting to transform an already existing structure, which plays host to oppression, to a structure which certainly induces a more liberated and anti-oppressive environment.

Social injustice was certainly prevalent within the structure in which the learners in my study found themselves having to learn. True to the discipline of social justice, it has remained my desire, throughout this study, to find a way to move one closer to experiences of social justice. However, social justice, according to Bell (1997), as mentioned in my literature

review, is a process. But Deleuze (1994) has contended that the aim of any process is not to perpetuate the process itself, but rather to achieve some sort of completion. Thus, using Deleuze's (1994) claims concerning operating at the border between what is known and what is unknown one can argue that that, in itself, may very well be a process whose completion lies in traversing such border to begin to operate with what is unknown, albeit, an imagined reality free from oppression. In the instance of my study, what the learners shared, was indeed an imagined reality free from the constraints and limitations exerted on the participants through repeated experiences of social injustices. However, getting to this reality required the merging of a known (past and present) with an unknown (future). Alternatively stated, a merging of an immaterial and material reality with a dematerial reality was required.

Nevertheless, for this immaterial future to become a material present, I am inclined to contend that what was required was Critical thinking. This is partially because Gynther (2009) postulates that critical thinking makes possible the acceptance of the notion of substantive equality being preferred over formal equality. Indeed Freire's (1996) call for the promotion of critical thinking was necessitated in my study. However, as shown above, in order to assist in moving from a reality that perhaps was devoid of such thinking imagination was required. Thus, Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination was also highly necessary in my study.

As regards substantive equality as opposed to formal equality, Gynther (2009) draws a distinction between the two. Gynther (2009) asserts that formal equality involves a mere equal application of rules; in other words, it operates as a blanket sort of equality in which all people are treated exactly the same. While the latter, substantive equality, Gynther (2009) asserts, focuses more on disadvantage, holding that the greater the disadvantage to which an individual or group has been subjected, the greater the support such individual or group should receive. This notion is clearly shown in the illustration (figure 3.2) which follows:

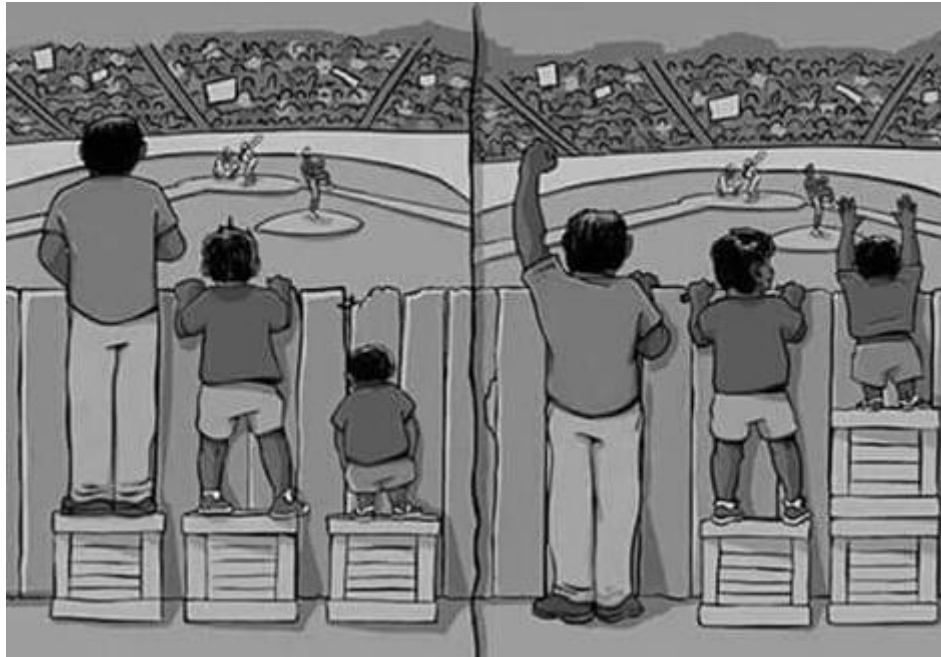


Figure 3.2

In the illustration above, it is apparent that unlike the instance of formal equality, in the instance of substantive equality an unequal application of rules is often necessitated in order to achieve equality. The image on the left shows how formal equality would only serve to perpetuate inequality while the one on the right shows how substantive equality is more likely to achieve equality. It thus becomes apparent, that when taking into consideration the different degrees of disadvantage to which the learners in my study have been subjected, to merely rely on formal equality, would have been insufficient.

I am thus inclined to argue that the learners in my study are very justified in being concerned about the fact, and my finding, that diversity, in their school, is inadequately catered for. Relying more on substantive equality would therefore appear somewhat more desirable when attempting to liberate marginalised learners, who have experienced differing degrees of inequality, so as to enable them to transcend the barriers which separates their immaterial and material reality from their dematerial reality. Nevertheless, as expressed numerous times above, in my study, I rely on imagination to act as the vehicle which transports one's thinking from the trappings and limitations of their immaterial and material reality towards a liberated dematerial reality.

Just as the learners in my study experienced differing degrees of inequality and oppression; so too did their imaginings in relation to the trappings and limitations of their immaterial and material realities differ. It is concerning these differing relations of their imaginings to their immaterial and material realities that the notion of “elliptic” becomes of relevance. This is because “elliptic” implies an oval-like shape, suggesting that various points along the shape are at varying distances from the centre, and therefore have differing relations with the centre itself.

### **3.5 How Deleuze’s Theory is Used in My Study in Relation to, and with Support from, the Texts and Philosophies of Other Authors**

Ranciere (2004) criticised Bourdieu’s (1984) arguments supporting cultural capital as a compass for the lives of many, which thus exacerbated inequality. When examining Ranciere’s (2004) criticism, a connection to the work of Deleuze (1994) became apparent to me. Ranciere (2004) highlights that Bourdieu’s (1984) study focuses only on education at the university level, thus excluding automatically the lower classes whom typically would have dropped out at the schooling level of education. Ranciere (2004) draws a line from Plato to Bourdieu showing that Plato, in his work, excluded the working class and Bourdieu does this too by focusing his attention only on the university level of education. What is argued by Ranciere (2004) is that an implication inherent in this exclusion is that the philosopher can only claim what philosophy claims for itself, and that is: the domain of fiction, as access to such domain is restricted to those at university level. However, by me using the work of Deleuze (1994) and his theory on imagination which frees one’s mind from constraints of experience in my study, it should become apparent that this domain of fiction can now be taken to the previously marginalised when they engage in their imaginative narratives. This is because imaginative narratives assist in freeing one’s mind of contextual constraints (Gough, 2004).

In engaging in imaginative narratives the marginalised, in my study were enabled to use this domain of fiction to plot a clear path to their attaining success. The plotting of this path towards success through imaginative narratives can be supported by Barone’s (2009) claim that narratives should not be used simply to re-present lived experiences but also to help one envision possibilities for change. I accordingly saw no reason why imaginative narratives



could not be used in the same manner. Thus, Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination and the freeing of minds would appear to be supported by Ranciere's (2004) desire to avoid the exclusion of the lower classes from the domain of fiction. My desire to use Deleuze's (1994) theory in my study therefore receives further support.

In keeping with one of my study's foci, being that of learner poor performance, to truly find one's own understandings of learner poor performance, I felt one should consider the work of Vinz (1997). Vinz (1997) suggested that attitudes, or rather what she called "dis-positions" needed to be thought of differently. To think of "dis-positions" differently Vinz (1997) called for an un-knowing and a not knowing of present understandings. In the instance of my study, I wished to apply this un-knowing to the understandings of learner poor performance and success that were shaped, and in many instances limited, by what was taken as common sense inherent in the already existing spaces in which learner poor performance and success were often experienced. These spaces, for the purposes of my study, simply put, were spaces of social injustice. Vinz (1997) expressed a desire for one to turn this so called common sense inside itself. So in respect of learners who had been subjected to poor performance, for the purposes of my study, common sense according to Åhlberg, Kaasinen, Kaivola and Houtsonen (2001) would be for the marginalised to respond in their day to day experiences of teaching and learning to immediate contextual demands. Such contextual demands, to list a few, were poor facilities and in some instances, a complete lack thereof.

However, viewing the response to contextual demands of those affected from a social justice perspective it should be noted that Hardiman and Jackson (1997) have advocated for such responses to occur in respect of matters directly influencing human beings in respect of that which may have ties with, for instance inequalities of the past giving birth to present learner poor performance. Bearing in mind Vinz's (1997) call for one to turn common sense inside itself, and taking Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) theory of Rhizomes into consideration, my suggestion regarding a response differs somewhat from that of Hardiman and Jackson (1997). I would suggest an examination of the possibility of responding to the need to simply have one's story of poor performance told and an imagining of the converse (academic success) promoted, without any immediate action. This is because given that rhizomatic spaces deny hierarchy and linear progression of thought, addressing immediate contextual issues first may not be as imminent in the grander scheme of attaining academic success as one may initially assume. In addition, using Deleuze's (1994) contention that imagination may enable one

easier access to an ideal, it becomes apparent that perhaps merely examining matters from an ideal perspective, albeit an imagined ideal, would help one obtain greater clarity in respect of how to eventually proceed towards success. This was preferred by me, as opposed to an immediate response as advocated by Hardiman and Jackson (1997).

Based on the previous paragraph, it can safely be said that in my study success is not merely imagined, but the path towards it is expressed through the use of imaginative narratives, which can find support in the work of Gough (2004). Gough (2004) who draws heavily on Deleuze's (1994) theories goes on to note that through the writing of our stories we are able to word and even re-word the world until these words better capture our lived experiences, despite their never being entirely accurate, we try anyway. We therefore see an echo of Deleuze's (1994) idea of moving from the experiences towards what is desired by trying to merge the two extremes to form a free moving vehicle of liberation. Gough (2004) has argued that it is through this process of trying to get ever closer to the desire that we are able to enhance our development as we move closer and closer to an understanding of ourselves and the world in which we live. Employing Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagining which allows imagination to act as a "go-between" which merges the ideal and the experience of something far from ideal to form a free moving vehicle, rather than relying solely on the story-telling, seemed, in my study, to pave a more accessible path towards success.

Gough's (2004) idea of allowing the process of story-telling to draw one closer to the desire thus appeared, in my study, to have close ties with Deleuze's (1994) theory of imagination. To divorce the two accordingly seems illogical to me. Bearing in mind Deleuze's (1994) idea of materialism's role in keeping the "dematerial" finite and Gough's (2004) desire to let the process play itself out, a view on action towards achieving success also becomes apparent to me. My apparent view is simply that once the ideal (the dematerial) can be imagined no immediate action should be taken, despite the prevalence of the non-ideal experience (immaterial). This is because in allowing the material to merge with the dematerial, a finite element is evoked, only then exactly what action should be taken to achieve the desire of success (dematerial) may be realistically determined by the observer.

### **3.6 Chapter Conclusion**

Having identified in this chapter, and focused on Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagining as the framing theory of my study a central theme emergent was that of merging concepts and ideas and understandings which ordinarily would not be merged. The theme of merging what may otherwise not be merged was relevant to me as my study attempted to pave a way forward towards success for the marginalised by bridging the gap between experience and the attainment of academic success. As a 'go-between' in the true spirit of Deleuzean thought imagination has served to operate as such bridge.

The significance of Deleuze (1994) and merging the previously often considered "unmergable" was naturally given much merit in my study which attempts to do much the same as far as merging what ordinarily would not be merged is concerned. In the absence of Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination which makes such merging possible the feasibility of my study would likely have been vastly minimized. I have therefore found myself at the mercy of his work, but have thoroughly enjoyed engaging in it philosophically. I accordingly remain hopeful that my interpretation of Deleuze's (1994) work and my framing of my study with it will be of assistance and inspiration to others wishing to rely on his work; and in particular his work surrounding imagination and its usefulness in merging what otherwise may not have been merged. Having hinted at how the theoretical framework discussed and described above influenced my data collection process, in the next chapter I will focus on my research methodology.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Hows, Whys, Whos and Wheres of Imagining**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

With the focus of my study being on how learners' individual and collective experiences of social injustice and their imaginings of success influence their performance, it seemed appropriate for me to adopt the methodological approach of narrative inquiry. A justification for my adoption of such an approach was because it enabled me, through learners' narratives, to explore their experiences of social injustices and their imaginings of success. This then placed me in a position to fathom how these learners' individual imaginings may have influenced their academic performances despite having been exposed to both individual, unique and collective, common instances of social injustices within the contexts of teaching and learning.

In this chapter my research design, instrumentation, techniques used in the data analysis as well as methodological constraints and ethical considerations will be discussed and justified. In addition to outlining my research methodology, in this chapter I will also present my data collection approach in tabulated form and a brief background description of each of the participants will be provided so as to aid the reader with regard to clarity and the contextualising of the origin of data presented in my study.

#### **4.2 Research Site**

I gathered my data at a school in which the experiencing of social injustices was likely, rather common-place. When I speak of social injustices as opposed to social justice, quite naturally I am referring to a context which is devoid of social justice itself. The school attended by the learners in my study was situated in a community in which poverty, unemployment, violence

and substance abuse was rife. All of the learners lived in this community and thus experienced very little of life outside of such a context. Contexts riddled with poverty, unemployment and substance abuse are generally home to many a social injustice (Thompson, McNicholl & Menter, 2016). While I do elaborate much further on the context in which data was gathered in my analysis chapters, I do feel it incumbent upon myself to provide a brief, and somewhat more personalised description of the research site in this chapter so as to assist the reader in perceiving possible issues of biased and credibility. I do, nevertheless, attempt to address these issues, as explained below.

As I drove towards the school, not knowing quite what to expect the familiar smells and sound of a neighbourhood in which I had grown up engulfed my senses. The distant and hollow echoing of a large industry which almost encapsulates the neighbourhood, and so holds it hostage to air and noise pollution, seemed so familiar to me. Despite that the fact that over a decade had passed since I last lived there, the sounds and smells still reminded me of how I felt growing up in such a neighbourhood. With constant air pollution, each breath, I felt, drew one closer to one's death. Oh yes, life was and likely is, very cheap in Wentworth. As a teenager, I did not school in this neighbourhood, but I had to return to it each day and witness from my upstairs bedroom window just how meaningless day to day living seemed amongst many of the residents. People spent most of their lives simply sitting on chairs placed on the verge of the roads, engaging in idle chit-chat while consuming large amounts of alcohol until most inhibitions were released. So much so, that these very individuals who, but just a few hours ago were sitting and drinking amongst friends, were suddenly fighting amongst themselves. Scenes often turned violent and the police were involved. But I had left a long time ago and never really had friends in the neighbourhood while growing up. I thus felt rather detached from these ironically familiar surrounds.

As I neared the school, I began to wonder. Would I be welcomed? Would I be allowed to conduct my study at this site? Would I have a problem getting people to participate in the study? These were all questions that flooded my mind. I kept thinking of my childhood despite admittedly feeling rather detached from the surrounds. I tried to make sense of these feelings and so attributed my detachment to the fact that I had neither been to that neighbourhood in years nor did I have any connection to it any longer in the form of friends

or family. In addition, although growing up in this neighbourhood, I never schooled there. I therefore could not help but wonder if I was making a good choice in using this space as a research site. However, I eventually resigned to the fact that perhaps my detachment would be advantageous in that I would be enabled to obtain and work with the data with much neutrality. Thus eliminating or at least reducing biases that may have manifested through my earlier life's associations with the space in question.

I entered the reception area of the school and asked if it would be possible for me to speak with the principal. I was informed that I would just need to wait a few minutes as he was in a meeting at that time. There were two boys sitting in the reception area at that time. They too were waiting to see the principal. Apparently they were in some sort of trouble for smoking on the school premises. It was not very long, when I saw a lady exiting the principal's office with a teenaged boy, whom I presumed was her son. Before they even left the reception area she began to speak to him rather loudly and angrily. From what I could hear, I gathered that he had just been suspended from school following an incident of violence in which he was involved. As bad as this may sound, insensitive, perhaps, these occurrences (that of violence and under-age smoking) assured me that I had indeed chosen an appropriate site for my study. This is because, according to Spina (2000), the prevalence of violence and underage smoking amongst teens can often be found in socially unjust contexts of teaching and learning.

## **4.3 Research Design**

### **4.3.1 Qualitative Approach**

The phenomenon explored in my study was learner imagination, which according to Nielsen *et al* (2010) is a complex one to explore. As such, understanding this phenomenon in as much detail as possible was justified. In 2005 Bowen contended that it was through the mode of qualitative research that one was enabled to explore a complex phenomenon in much detail. Such sentiment was later supported by Tavallaei and Talib (2010) who argued that understanding complex issues often associated with human beings on as detailed a level as

possible requires a qualitative approach so as to reach the depths to which human complexity goes. Preferring a qualitative approach in my study, I was thus able to explore the complex phenomenon of learner imagination while fathoming the influences on it by social injustices and acknowledging its links to learner performance.

My study was located firmly within a qualitative research design as its purpose of exploring how learners' imaginings of success may influence their performance was dependent on exploring and giving voice to learners' experiences of social injustices and their imaginings of success. This purpose also led to, and supported, the selection of personal narratives as a strategy of inquiry, as articulated above. I was thus enabled to enter worlds of experiences and imaginings unique to the learners in my study, whose exposure to poor academic performance had become so commonplace.

#### **4.3.2 Critical Paradigm**

A paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs. It represents a worldview that defines for its holder the nature of the world, the individual's place in it and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Critical theory is a term that usually refers to the theoretical tradition developed by the Frankfurt school, in particular a group of writers who were connected to the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt (Bradley-Levine & Carr, 2015).

Ontologically speaking, critical theorists contend that reality was shaped over time by a congeries of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender factors and then crystallized into a series of structures that are presently inappropriately taken as real (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). With regard to epistemology and the critical theory paradigm, the researcher and what is being researched are taken to be linked to the extent that their relationship is transactional. The critical theory paradigm calls for a methodology geared towards structural transformation which is often achieved through consciousness-raising in respect of the acceptance of historical structures which have been taken as the norm (Denzin & Lincoln

2000). In my study I sought to raise consciousness amongst a group of economically disadvantaged learners about the possibility of transcendence of one's circumstances. I focused on learners being educated in contexts of social injustices and the often associated poor academic performance being taken as the norm; I aimed to use one's imagination as a starting point for the attainment of liberation.

Accordingly, I essentially worked within a critical paradigm seeking to explore and give voice to learners' experiences of social injustices and poor performance as well as their imaginings of academic success. My study attempts to go beyond mere understanding of experiences of social injustices and learner poor performance so as to provide a means by which marginalised beings can begin to transcend their everyday experiences through the use of imagination and so be awoken to ways of constructing a better context of learning for themselves (Neuman, 1997). This coincides with Deleuze's (1994) notion of freeing one's mind through imagination in order to avoid being limited by repetitions of experiences, in this case, experiences of learner poor performance and social injustices refer. An aim of empowering people to transcend their everyday experiences so as to construct better worlds for themselves is a key characteristic of the critical theory paradigm (Neuman, 1997).

As is evident in the previous paragraph, my desire to free one's mind through imagination with an aim of transcending one's everyday experiences thus justifies the positioning of my study within the critical paradigm. Freire's (1996) assertion that liberation is a necessity in adding value to education is of relevance in my study as I sought to liberate the voice of those historically silenced, and whose stories may otherwise have not been told, through the use of narrative inquiry to which I allude under the next heading.

#### **4.3.3 Narrative Inquiry and Imaginative Narratives**

In my study I chose to use the methodology of narrative inquiry. The purpose of Narrative research is to study personal experience and meaning-making in a systematic



manner (Hutto & Gallagher, 2017). The meaning making of learners' imaginings of success, in a context in which one constantly experiences poor performance and social injustices took place in my study through what Vinz (1995) refers to as the "dis-positioning" of one's understandings of knowing. I wished to hear the unique stories and experiences of learner poor performance and social injustices from the participants in my study, as well as their imaginings of success despite these experiences. Thus, given that many of the participants in my study likely never experienced complete success in a completely socially just environment as social justice is a process and a goal (Adams & Bell, 2016; Bell, 1997); I opted to follow Gough's (2004) suggestion to deploy fictional texts to obtain story lines of educational inquiry. I accordingly asked learners to simply imagine having experienced success in conditions that could be termed socially just and to then present these imaginings in the form of imaginative narratives. Narrative inquiry exists in the social sciences and is now being successfully used in studies of educational experiences (Henz, van Driel & Verloop, 2009), thus my decision to use this method of inquiry in my study is justified.

The main theory informing narrative inquiry is that humans are story-telling organisms both individually, and socially, they thus lead storied lives (Henz *et al*, 2009). Therefore, narrative is the study of how humans experience the world (Henz *et al*, 2009). However, as is apparent from my mention of imaginative narratives above, narrative inquiry alone, based solely on actual experiences, seemed inadequate in the instance of my study. Gough (2004) acknowledges that producing texts through the writing of stories capturing individuals experiences, is a method of discovery and yet the "worded world" never accurately, precisely, or even completely captures the studied world. Gough (2004) therefore suggests the use of fictions and imagination to capture what words, due to experience, may sometimes prevent. Deleuze (1994) has argued that repetition tends to limit the mind and expressions of one exposed to limiting repetitions. The learners in my study have been repeatedly exposed to instances of social injustices and poor academic performance. In my study, I thus called on participants to imagine experiences of success. I did this so that they were neither required to recall what may have never been experienced, nor were they required to attempt to express what may indeed have been experienced but nevertheless remained a limited experience through repetition. Accordingly, while the use of narrative inquiry remains justified in my study, deploying imaginative narratives rather than mere narratives alone seemed more appropriate in my study for the reasons expressed above.

In addition to my justifications above, educational research within this research design of narrative inquiry concerns itself with construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories of what it means to educate and be educated (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, this reconstruction of stories, albeit imagined may not be as far reaching as one may be inclined to initially perceive. I accordingly opted to allow learners to write their imaginative narratives in their own time and in their own desired spaces of writing so as to facilitate this process of construction and reconstruction of one's personal story, despite it being imagined.

#### **4.4 Instrumentation**

The discussion on imaginative narratives, although ordinarily belonging under instrumentation was included with the discussion on narrative inquiry under the research design as it enabled elaboration on the research design itself. It thus seems appropriate for me to move directly from my discussion on imaginative narratives to further discussions on the instrumentation used in my study so as to not divorce imaginative narratives entirely from its ordinary placement. I will however, include a more detailed discussion on imaginative narratives under its ordinary placement, being that of instrumentation, in the paragraphs which follow.

Instrumentation can be described as data sourcing tools used to address the research questions (Murray & Beglar, 2009). Murray and Beglar (2009) contend that the significance of describing one's instrumentation in a study centers on the issues of allowing readers to understand more fully the study, replication and operationalisation. For these reasons the instruments used in my study, the order in which they were used and the justifications for the use of the instruments will be explained in the paragraphs that follow.

In my study the instrumentations used, and the order in which they were used was as follows: photo elicitation, imaginative narratives, individual semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. My reason for this order was because I wished to commence with a broad focus on one being educated in spaces of social injustice, and then gradually progress to more individualistic and often times unique accounts of social injustices and imaginings of success through the use of individual semi-structured interviews and imaginative narratives, respectively. Finally, I wished to shift the focus away from the individual and back to the

broader phenomenon itself, and this was best achieved through the use of a focus group interview. I will now discuss each data collection method in greater detail, commencing with photo elicitation.

#### **4.4.1 Photo Elicitation**

The simple idea on which photo elicitation is based is that of inserting a photograph or photographs into an interview (Harper, 2002). Harper (2002) contends that images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than words alone, often resulting in information, feelings and memories that may never have been evoked had one not seen a particular image. Berger (1992) expressed these sentiments ten years earlier when he claimed that human beings experience a thrill in photographs due to the large onrush of memory they often evoke concerning something we know quite well, but never really reflected upon.

In my study I wished for the participants to reflect upon, and share, their memories of experiences of social injustices within their familiar contexts of teaching and learning with the primary phenomenon in my study remaining as that of learner imagination concerning success despite such experiences. Thus, the evoking of memories of social injustices that may in the absence of photographs have neither been evoked nor reflected on resulted in rich data for my study as deep feelings about such experiences also came to the fore during my interviews. Accordingly, my decision to use photo elicitation was given much merit through the end results obtained.

Baxter, Cooper, Gray, Reid, Vergunst and Williams (2015) claim that photo elicitation as a data collection method is often successful in obtaining rich, detailed qualitative data, thus lending further support to my decision to use such a data collection method in my study. Photo elicitation allows a photograph or set of photographs to act as a dominant yet neutral third party in an interview process, often shifting attention away from the participants so as to reduce feelings of intimidation which often result in very superficial data being obtained (Collier & Collier, 1986).

To further reduce feelings of intimidation, although I took the photos myself, I allowed the learners to select which photos they wished to speak about. Baxter *et al* (2015) support the

idea of allowing participants to select photographs with which they feel most comfortable so as to set them at ease. Admittedly, it may have been preferable to allow learners to take the photographs themselves. However, I opted to take them myself as the principal had set a restriction on how photographs around the school were to be taken. The restriction being that no signage which identified the school could be in any photo. Being fully aware of the restriction, I felt it would be easier if I took the photographs myself. Nevertheless, not detracting from my reason for using photo elicitation as a data collection instrument, in my study I wished to obtain rich, detailed qualitative data while remaining cognisant of the phenomenon of learner imagination itself. Thus, the use of photo elicitation, a means by which attention could be shifted away from participants themselves while still yielding rich, detailed data and reducing participants' feelings of intimidation was most useful in my study.

In addition to reducing feelings of intimidation, Baxter *et al* (2015) argue that the use of photographs during interviews allow both participants and the researcher to constantly and simultaneously turn to the images and explore their contents together. One thus sees that a collaborative approach was promoted. I also promoted collaboration between the participants by allowing them to speak to each other about selected photographs. Doing this, I felt, not only promoted collaboration, but also aided in shifting attention away from individual participants so as to reduce feelings of intimidation. The promotion of a collaborative approach was very appropriate in my study as it was befitting to my working within the critical paradigm, a paradigm which is often in favour of collaboration amongst the researcher and all participants (Bradley-levine & Carr, 2015).

#### **4.4.2 Imaginative Narratives**

Subsequent to the photo elicitation, which focused primarily on learners' experiences of social injustices, the learners who participated in my study were given an opportunity to write imaginative narratives. These were written at their convenience and in spaces comfortable to them with the focus being on the imagining of academic success despite learning in spaces of social injustices. Social injustice, rather than social justice through the multiple forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, ageism and HIVism as identified by Hardiman and Jackson (1997), according to Adams and Bell (2016) by and large remains pervasive throughout societies. Thus, asking these learners to account for their experiences of success

rather than poor performance in spaces of social justice may not have been realistic. In addition, keeping in mind Deleuze's (1994) argument that imagination enables one's mind to be freed from contextual constraints, it was hoped that the writing of imaginative narratives would assist learners in freeing their minds from constraints which existed in their daily contexts. Indeed the writing of imaginative narratives resulted in a freeing of the minds, as will become apparent in my two data analysis chapters.

According to Young (2000) spaces of complete social justice are currently non-existent and remain an ideal as social justice is not something that can just be adopted, but rather it is a way of being which requires constant effort in respect of changing attitudes and perceptions as well as thinking and rethinking practices and behaviour. I was thus inclined, in my study, to rather call on participants to simply imagine existing in spaces in which social justice was prevalent, and thus academic success was indeed easier to achieve. This then paved the way for participants to imagine achieving academic success instead of focusing on their oftentimes realities of learner poor performance.

Vinz (1995) highlights the need to dislodge embedded meanings from what is already known and seems concrete. This imagining, which I asked the participants to engage in may be a sort of science fiction which enabled them to begin writing at the frontiers of their knowledge, and at the border which separated their knowledge from ignorance and so eventually as argued by Deleuze (1994) the lines between the two became blurred. Accordingly, these participants were able to imagine what had never really been experienced by them.

Once these participants were able to imagine existing in spaces of social justice and experiencing academic success, although likely having never experienced it, I was placed in a better position to fathom what ideals in spaces of teaching and learning need to be realised so as to better equip these participants, mainly marginalised learners, to attain academic success. It was and is still hoped by me that such a discovery would assist curriculum developers in designing a curriculum that equips marginalised learners with the skills to engage in their schooling in such a way that these ideal spaces of social justice are eventually realised so as to make the attainment of academic success a little more attainable to the marginalised in society. The use of imaginative narratives in my study, in this manner remains justified. I

make this assertion because once limitations in thought were removed, through imagination; the learners were then able to see ways of removing limitations in reality. Accordingly, the possibility of replacing learner poor performance with success increased dramatically.

#### **4.4.3 Individual Semi-Structured Interviews**

The use of the interview in research marks a move towards regarding knowledge as being generated between humans (Kvale, 2006). Given that the learners in my study often experienced social injustices while interacting with others, generating knowledge in this manner seemed appropriate to me. This was my thinking, as the conditions which gave rise to experiences of social injustices were now somewhat mimicked in the process of data collection.

I did, however, opt for the use of semi-structured interviews in my data collection process. A reason for this choice was that semi-structured interviews allow ideas to emerge that have not been predetermined by the researcher; questions can be revised accordingly if needed during the collection of data (Berg, 2009). As the learners began to speak about their experiences of social injustices as well as how these experiences may have related to their often poor academic performance I began to fathom the possibility of relations between their experiences and their performance which may not have been glaringly obvious to them at first glance. The use of semi-structured interviews thus placed me in an advantageous position as far as the revision of questions was concerned, so as to allow prompting and probing which often times led to the emergence of relationships between experience and performance which may otherwise not have been realised. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews was accordingly invaluable to me.

In addition to the flexibility expressed above, questions were open-ended, with the intention of generating discussion with participants. Some questions were constructed during the interviews, presenting the opportunity for participants to be probed for details or to elaborate on issues as they emerged. This served to increase the possibility of yielding rich and detailed feedback, thereby providing greater breadth of coverage; especially as far as possible causes for poor learner performance was concerned. My being in a position to probe also helped to gain clarity with regard to the understanding and interpretation of participant responses.

The interviews were iterative in nature, as I felt that a constant back and forth interaction between myself and the participants was necessary to fathom links between experiences of social injustices and learner poor performance as such links are not always immediately apparent. Berkowitz (1997) argues that the role of iteration serves a reflexive process in that it is instrumental in gaining insight and developing meaning in qualitative research. Having my interviews be iterative in nature, I was thus able to visit and revisit the data as well as connect it with emerging insights. This gave rise to a progressive unfolding of refined foci and understandings of learner poor performance, and importantly its links to experiences of social injustices.

The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. This enabled me to repeatedly scan the data and draw links and relationships between individuals' experiences; often exposing commonalities as far as experiences of social injustices was concerned. In addition, I was able to draw links between phenomena such as learner imagination, learner experiences of social injustices and learner poor performance. Viewing the data in this manner, I was thus able to gauge how such phenomena may or may not influence learners' academic performance.

A problem often encountered with interviews is the tendency for participants to give socially desirable responses, which may not be a reflection of their honest responses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Such responses may not actually be the manner in which the participants would operate within their regular teaching and learning environments. I thus, during the interviews, made reference to some responses which had emerged during the photo elicitation engagement, as these responses were evoked through viewing pictures. I also made reference to some opinions and views expressed in the imaginative narratives which had been written by the participants in their own time and often in the comfort of their own homes. Given that these views and opinions had been expressed in a more private and relaxed context absent of the influences associated with the interview process, I was quite confident that my referring to them would, to an extent, take participants back to a response less influenced by the desire to give socially acceptable answers, as is often the case with interviews. I did, however, remain cognisant of the fact that I needed to focus on the phenomena being studied; I thus decided to use a single focus group interview a week after the individual interviews. This enabled me to shift the focus away from the individual and back to the phenomena. A detailed description of my focus group interview will now follow.

#### **4.4.4 Focus Group Interview**

In an attempt to get responses less individualistic with a greater emphasis on the phenomena under study, I also made use of a single focus group interview. This was the final instrument used in my data collection process. The discussion was voice recorded.

Focus groups are a form of qualitative research and they assist in exploring topics with an emphasis on how views and attitudes change when respondents are able to discuss answers with each other (Gibbs, 1997). As indicated earlier, I, in my study, adopted a qualitative approach so as to gain a detailed understanding of the phenomenon of learner imagination. Thus, as far as engaging in qualitative research is concerned, I felt quite justified in my decision to use a focus group discussion.

In my study, I also wished to explore how learners' imaginings of success as well as their individual and collective experiences of social injustices influenced their academic performance. Based on the photo elicitation exercise, which took place prior to the focus group discussion, it seemed apparent to me that much of the learner's experiences of social injustices were interactive in nature. Also, having already read through their imaginative narratives, prior to this focus group discussion, I was able to arrive at the realisation that their imaginings of success were largely influenced by their experiences, some of which had already been alluded to. Given that focus groups by nature are interactive and capitalise on communication between participants (Hyden & Bulow, 2003). I felt it incumbent upon myself to create a setting for data collection which promoted interaction and communication, especially while dealing with the issue of learner performance, as I wished for the influences of learners' collective experiences and imaginations to have some bearing on the learners' discussions around their academic performance. The focus group discussion, as an instrument, proved rather useful in this regard.

In 1995 Kitzinger argued that data yielded in focus group discussions is oftentimes collective data. During the focus group discussion I did not ask each person to respond to a specific question, instead participants were encouraged to talk to one another around the topic of focus. The result of such an approach was that collective data was indeed yielded as opposed to an individual view. I was pleased with such a result because as I indicated earlier, it was



my intention, during the focus group discussion to shift the focus away from the individual and back to the phenomenon itself. In particular, I wanted the phenomenon of learner imagination (imaginings of success), having been influenced by collective experiences of social injustices to come to the fore, in addition I wished to fathom how such imaginings of success and experiences of injustices influenced learner performance.

Hyden and Bulow (2003) proffer that because focus groups promote interaction among participants, ideas are often merged. The merging of learners' experiences of social injustices as well as their otherwise, individual imaginings of success, helped me, to an extent, gauge just how influential such experiences and imaginings are on one's academic success when learners with shared and individual experiences as well as unique, individual imaginings are thrust into a single education system and in particular a single classroom. During the focus group discussion, it soon became evident to me that the learners in my study, different as they may be, had their academic performance influenced in much the same way. For instance, certain, common experiences of social injustices provoked similar imaginings of success which in turn influenced learners' academic performance in much the same way. I will, however, elaborate on this matter when dealing with the findings of my study. Nevertheless, the point which I intend to make here is that the use of a focus group discussion in my study was well justified in that interaction among the learners was promoted to such an extent that ideas did indeed merge. Thus, an experience, as far as the merging of ideas about academic performance and success is concerned, as close to what learners face on a daily basis in their teaching and learning contexts was created.

The following table highlights my data collection approach as well as why I chose the instrumentation which I did, and why I used such instrumentation in the order in which I did, while bearing in mind my key research questions.

<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Photo Elicitation</b>	<b>Imaginative Narratives</b>	<b>Individual Structured Interviews</b>	<b>Semi-Group Interviews</b>
<b>Research question to which instrumentation promoted a response</b>	What are learners' experiences of social injustices (unjust spaces)?	How might these socially unjust spaces influence learners' imagination of success?	How might these imaginations influence learner performance?	Why might these imaginations influence learner performance in the way that they have?
<b>Focus (Narrow/Broad)</b>	On common experiences of social injustices and the phenomenon of learner imagination. Therefore broad.	On personal imaginings of success. Therefore, narrow.	On personal experiences of social injustices and poor academic performance, with personal imaginative narratives in mind. Therefore, narrow.	On common experiences of social injustices and academic performance, as well as the phenomenon of learners' imaginings of success. Therefore, broad.
<b>Form (written/spoken)</b>	Spoken. Likely spontaneous	Written. Likely planned and well thought out.	Spoken. Likely spontaneous, but without influence of the group.	Spoken. Likely spontaneous and evolved through group interactions.
<b>Experience/Imagination</b>	Drawn from experiences which occurred at locations in the pictures.	Drawn from imagination. But influenced by the recollection of experiences evoked in the photo elicitation. An imagining of how learners would like things to be in order to nurture success.	Drawn from experiences of one's own academic performance. But remaining cognisant of one's previously written imaginative narrative.	Drawn from experiences but with the personal imaginings, as well as imaginings of others in mind.

Figure 4.1

## 4.5 Participants

The participants in my study were twelve learners, ranging from the Grades 8 to 11. My reason for choosing learners as opposed to teachers was because the learners themselves were directly affected by social injustices in respect of their related poor performance. My reason for choosing this category of learners (i.e. Gr 8 to 11) was because I wished to obtain responses from more mature learners (as opposed to primary school learners) so as to minimize the possibility of immature responses which may have resulted in the generation of data which would have been less rich, and possibly superficial.

My research site was a single high school in which social injustice was overt and learners at the site were indeed performing poorly. In essence, I opted to use as my research site a poverty-stricken school with a low pass rate. My unit of analysis was thus learners who were performing poorly in a single school which exists in a context of overt social injustice. This was to ensure that the spaces from which the data originated were in fact socially unjust in nature. In addition to this reasoning, my decision to use a single school rather than multiple schools was to ensure a common experience amongst participants which did, in my opinion, make the probing for, and obtaining of, deeper responses in the focus group discussion more easily achievable.

#### **4.5.1 Sampling**

I needed to obtain data from a small group of learners that was largely representative of the population of the school which I chose as my research site. This is because, when obtaining data, factors such as expense, time and accessibility frequently prevent researchers from gaining information from the entire population (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). I therefore decided that I would include in my study only twelve learners who, when combined, represented the majority of the school population as far as race, gender, academic performance and socio-economic background were concerned. In essence, the learners in my study were predominantly Coloured by race with roughly 33% of them belonging to the African race group. The gender split was relatively even with slight dominance in favour of females, as is typical of high schools in the neighbourhood in which my research site was situated. I will elaborate on this point in the following paragraph.

Given that my study was qualitative in nature and heterogeneity was indeed present amongst learners who attended the school I had to select a sample that respected the heterogeneity present. Taking into consideration the higher high school dropout rate amongst males in the community in which this school served, due to factors such as drug and alcohol addictions as well as gang related violence, and the “anti-macho” connotations of being academic, as alluded to in my literature review; I decided to include five males and seven females ranging across grades 8 to 11.

The twelve learners who participated in my study, ranging across grades 8 to 11 were assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The following pseudonyms thus refer: In grade 11, Lawrence, Sindisiwe and Daina. In grade 10, Khethiwe, Tatum and Toby. In grade 9, Bianca, Zac and Clint. While in grade 8, Erin, Nicole and Raymond. A brief description of each of the participants, presented in tabulated form, follows:

Learner	Age	Gender	Grade	Race	Personal Background
Lawrence	16	Male	11	African	Attended a primary school located in a township. Raised by his grandmother who receives a government pension.
Sindisiwe	17	Female	11	African	Attended a primary school located in the same area as her current high school. Lives with her mother, who is unemployed, and her grandmother, who receives a government pension.
Daina	16	Female	11	Coloured	Attended a primary school which is a feeder school to her current high school. Lives with both parents, both of whom are employed, and her younger brother.
Khethiwe	15	Female	10	African	Attended a private primary school which caters to the upper classes. Lost both of her parents in an accident and is now being raised by her aunt who works as a secretary in her current high school.
Tatum	15	Female	10	Coloured	Attended primary school which is a feeder school to her current high school. Lives with both parents, who are currently employed, and is an only child.
Toby	15	Male	10	Coloured	Attended primary school which is a feeder school to his current high school. Lives with both parents, both of whom are employed, and an older sister.
Bianca	15	Female	9	Coloured	Attended primary school which is a feeder school to her current high school. Lives with both parents, both of whom are teachers, and incidentally her father works at her current high school.
Zac	14	Male	9	Coloured	Attended a primary school located in the same area as his current high school. Lives with both of his parents and is an only child. His father works as a soccer coach and his mother is self-employed.
Clint	14	Male	9	Coloured	Attended a primary school located in the same area as his current high school. Lives with his grandmother and an aunt, both of whom are unemployed.
Erin	13	Female	8	African	Attended primary school which is a feeder school to her current high school. Lives with both parents. Her father is a police officer and her mother is unemployed.
Nicole	12	Female	8	Coloured	Attended a primary school located in a neighbouring community to that of her current high school. Lives with her mother, who is unemployed and two younger brothers.
Raymond	13	Male	8	Coloured	Attended a primary school located in the same area as his current high school. Lives with his father who is self-employed.

Figure 4.2

As is apparent from the table presented above, most of the participants in my study do, to some degree, come from backgrounds that are rather unsettling. Be it homes with unemployed adults acting as caregivers, or homes that do not reflect the often more socially accepted matrimonial, nuclear families. In many instances, a combination of unemployment and a non-reflection of a traditionally socially acceptable family were present.

In addition, the vast majority of the participants, as is the case with learners throughout the school in which my study was located, have only been exposed to a schooling environment from their primary school days, that closely reflects the kind of environment in which they currently find themselves at high school level. To be elaborate, as discussed in my data analysis chapter, it is an environment riddled with insufficient resources, unruly behaviour,

and a general lack of concern for academics on the part of many a learner. These characteristics greatly influenced and shaped the kinds of data present in my study, as well as affected the manner in which I went about analysing the data. I had to, therefore, at all times, remain cognisant of the participants' limited views concerning education and in particular, understandings of academic success.

In respect of participants' understandings of academic success, I had to remain mindful of the fact that most of them considered their academic performance to be average, with a few of them claiming to be below average. I selected participants with such self-reported academic performance because my study, in addition to the imagining of success, focussed too on learner poor performance. It would therefore, in my opinion, have been difficult to gauge the transcendence of circumstances through imagining success despite social injustices and poor performance in respect of a group of learners whose academic performance was already considered by the learners themselves to be good.

#### **4.6 A Thematic Analysis of Data**

Analysing data thematically focuses on identifying themes and patterns of living or behaviour (Aronson, 1994). Given that in my study I deliberately chose a single school as a research site so as to promote the emergence of common experiences, it thus seemed reasonable for me to engage in a thematic analysis of data which would likely result in the emergence of common themes and patterns of experiences. The first step involved is the collection of data, usually followed by the transcribing of the data so as to provide a written, yet visual presentation of data from which themes generally emerge (Spradley, 1979). I thus, as explained above, collected my data using multiple forms of instrumentation.

Subsequent to collecting the data, I then set about transcribing the data, as suggested by Spradley (1979). The transcriptions were based on the recordings of the photo elicitation, individual semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews. As far as the imaginative narratives were concerned, they were already in written form, and I had no desire to alter their presentation. This was because I felt that re-typing them may have run the risk of altering their presentation which could possibly have resulted in emphasis being placed on ideas that the participants may otherwise have not desired. Accordingly, leaving the already written imaginative narratives in their original form seemed most desirable to me.

Aronson (1994) suggests that once themes and patterns become evident after viewing the data in its written form, one should then identify all the data related to specific themes and group such data together. As will become apparent in my chapters covering my data analysis, in my study, following Aronson's (1994) method five themes emerged. I thus grouped the data relating to each of the five themes accordingly and so appropriately used the data to respond to each of my four research questions.

Further to the identification of themes, Merriam (1998) argues that under each theme additional patterns of relationships amongst data may emerge, and this will then constitute sub-themes, which often support the broader themes. In my analysis, under each of the five themes many sub-themes did indeed emerge and each act to in some way support their respective themes by expounding on the key arguments of each theme. Finally, as purported by Aronson (1994) literature was interwoven in each theme so as to add merit to the underlying arguments central to each of my themes. In essence, a thematic analysis of the data enabled me to group the participants' common experiences of social injustices and academic performance as well as common patterns in their imaginings of academic success into themes which in some way highlighted underlying arguments regarding learners' experiences of social injustices and imaginings of academic success.

#### **4.7 Limitations of the Study**

Following from the previous heading, the fact that the participants in my study had limited exposure to a specific type of school setting, in particular, one very typical of contemporary and predominantly coloured communities in South Africa, I had to bear in mind that understandings of academic success may be confined to what may often be more broadly viewed as mediocre performance. I therefore encouraged much freedom of imagination when discussing and writing about academic success so as to, in some way, transcend the inhibiting barriers, preventing the participants in my study from viewing academic success in a more broadly acceptable way. For instance, distinctions in all subjects and admission to top ranked tertiary institutions free from limitations often associated with financial constraints suddenly became a possibility for the learners in my study.

#### **4.8 Trustworthiness and Validity**

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be trusted (Patton, 2002). I opted to use triangulation, which according to Trochim (2001), essentially involves the use of two or more methods of data collection. I did this to enhance the trustworthiness of the research. The use of multiple methods of data collection namely individual semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, photo elicitations and the writing of imaginative narratives, was in line with what Patton (2002) points to as an important advantage of using triangulation of a multi-modal nature. Patton (2002) argues that in using multiple techniques to collect data, the weakness of one data collection technique could be compensated for by the strengths of another technique.

In my study, where a technique placed too much focus on experience, such as photo elicitations, attention was shifted towards imagination when the writing of imaginative narratives was used. Although, these focussed heavily on imagination, and so techniques evoking experience were then necessitated. I thus found myself performing a delicate balancing act between techniques focused on experience and those focused on imagination. Nevertheless, the combination of such techniques, used in as balanced a manner as possible, enhanced the trustworthiness of my findings.

Further, in respect of trustworthiness, I relied on voluntary participation, as well as the depth, richness, and scope of the data achieved. All participants were people with whom I was unfamiliar, and they each had the option to remain anonymous. Hence, reasons for dishonesty were at a minimum. In addition, I refrained from offering interpretations or opinions during data collection. Thus, my use of multiple methods of data collection combined with the voluntary nature of participation added to the trustworthiness of the data used in my study.

In respect of validity, I relied on Vithal's (2003) notion of generativity. Generativity, as a validity construct, inspires a reader to decide what and how the claims in a study pertain to their own context, or experience. The findings of my study simply provide a glimpse of what some learners said and thought, and readers may decide to what extent the views expressed represents or digresses from their own.

## **4.9 Credibility**

Trochim (2001) asserts that credibility refers to the process of ascertaining whether the results of a study are believable or true from the participant's perspective. In order to ensure credibility in my study, as encouraged by Patton (2002), member checks were used. I handed participants transcripts of the recordings from the photo elicitation, individual interviews as well as the focus group discussion. I also presented them with notes containing emerging themes which I wished to use in my study.

The practices described above, enabled me to obtain participants' feedback on the extent of my interpretation of what they had said. In addition, meeting with participants individually, subsequent to the initial photo elicitation assisted tremendously in this regard. In these individual meetings, data collected from the photo elicitation and notes taken were verified, affirmed, elaborated upon and modified, if it was deemed necessary to do so. Participants were therefore afforded the opportunity to reflect on their views, reaffirm their stances or indicate where they felt their perspectives were inaccurately represented, which ultimately enhanced the credibility of my study.

## **4.10 Ethical Considerations**

Consent was sought from the twelve participants and their parents/legal guardians for their participation in my study, in particular, the data collection process. Consent was obtained through the participants' and their parents' or legal guardians' signing of a form of informed consent in which the aim of my study was specified as well as the approximate duration of their participation. All participants as well as their parents/legal guardians were informed of the method by which data was recorded. In addition, the participants and their parents/legal guardians were assured that they would not be disadvantaged in any way should they choose not to participate or choose to leave/withdraw from my study at any stage. Participation was on a voluntary basis, and pseudonyms were used in respect of each participant to maintain their anonymity.

Consent was also sought from the school (the principal) which was attended by the learners as well as from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education. Such consent was obtained in



a manner similar to the one expressed above concerning the participants. Consent for the taking of photographs of various locations in and around the school was sought. However, the school and the DoE had to be assured that the name of the school itself would not be displayed and all photographs would be taken at short distances in areas that are common among many schools so as to minimise the chances of the school being identified. Thus, the photographs used in my study bear this out. In addition to this, the principal was informed that should any or all photographs not meet his/her approval they would not be published. No photographs were taken of learners and/or staff members, hence consent in this regard was not required. Upon the completion of my study the outcomes of my study were presented to each of the participants and their parents/legal guardians at a seminar, and printed copies of these outcomes were provided to each of them. They were each given an opportunity to object, but never did so.

#### **4.11 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter I presented my research design, instrumentation, techniques used in the data analysis as well as methodological constraints and ethical considerations. For the benefit of the reader I, subsequent to presenting my instrumentation used and a description of the participants, reduced each of those to a tabulated representation. It is hoped that in doing that it firstly became somewhat easier for the reader to identify quickly my reasons for the instrumentation used as well as my reasons for the order in which each instrument was used. Secondly, it is hoped that the tabulated representations provided easily accessible information concerning each of the participant's backgrounds for purposes of contextualisation. My next two chapters will rely on the key theory which framed my study, as set out in the previous chapter. The following two chapters will cover the analysis of the data which was heavily influenced by the theoretical framework upon which I relied, as well as the thematic approach to data analysis as explained in this chapter.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Aspects, Experiences and Spaces of Social Injustices**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I set out my methodological approach and justified my use of narrative enquiry. I explained how such an approach benefitted my study which focused on how learners' individual and collective experiences of social injustice and their imaginings of success influenced their academic performance. In this chapter, remaining cognisant of my methodological approach, my theoretical framing and the prevailing literature concerning the focus of my study, I set about to analyse the data presented. The data presented and the analysis thereof proved to be rather extensive in length. For this reason, my analysis has been divided into two chapters, this chapter as well as the next. In the current chapter I focus on learners experiences of social injustices as well as aspects and spaces of social injustices. The themes included in this chapter answer my first two research questions. While in the next chapter, I focus on learners' imaginations and their responses to social injustices with the themes in that chapter answering my second two research questions.

During my analysis of the data, five themes emerged, with the following foci: The first theme focused on what aspects of schooling learners find to be socially unjust. The second theme focused on the learners' experiences of schooling, in particular, experiences which they consider to be socially unjust. The first two themes thus respond to my research question of what are learners' experiences of social injustices within school. The third theme focused on the spaces that represent social injustices. Thus, assisting in responding to my research question concerning how might socially unjust spaces influence learners' imaginings of success. The fourth and fifth themes, which will be covered in the next chapter, respectively focused on learners responses to social injustices; and finally, ways in which learners address social injustices, often through the imagining of success. Accordingly, the fourth and fifth themes responded to my final two research questions of how might learners imaginings of

success influence their performance as well as why might their imaginings of success influence academic performance in the way in which it does.

Based on the above, I decided to name the themes as follows: Theme 1: Aspects of schooling which are considered by learners as socially unjust; Theme 2: Learners experiences of what they view as social injustices within school; Theme 3: School spaces that represent social injustices; Theme 4: Learners' responses to social injustices; and theme 5: Imagining ways to address social injustices. Themes one through three are dealt with in the current chapter, while themes four and five are covered in chapter six.

The five themes are unequal in length, as more data was present for some than others, and in each theme several sub-themes are presented. Under each theme and in many sub-themes I have inserted pictures which were used during the photo elicitation process, as reference was often made to these pictures in learners' responses. I have also taken direct quotations from the spoken and written words of the learners, inserted, and analysed them. I have merged and interwoven both spoken responses from interviews, and written extracts from imaginative narratives to tell a composite story detailing exactly what experiences the learners in my study have had of social injustices, their imaginings of success as well as how such experiences and imaginings have influenced their academic performances.

## **5.2 Wentworth: Contextualising the School and the Learners with Social Injustice and Marginalisation in Mind**

To aid the reader in gaining perspective on the context in which the data which follows emerged, I feel it necessary to briefly remind the reader of the description of the school and the learners with specific reference to the neighbourhood in which the learners live and the neighbourhood in which the school is situated. Such neighbourhood is, however, one and the same. Common amongst individuals living and being educated in this particular neighbourhood is the conception that social injustices are often interwoven in the fabric which constitutes the daily lives of many, including the participants in my study. I hope that

through explaining this specific context, as well as my understanding of social injustice, as opposed to social justice itself, the reader may be in a better position to see that the conception of such an interwoven relationship may not be very far reaching, especially when considering factors and experiences unique to this particular neighbourhood and its residence. I will now briefly present such factors and experiences in the description of Wentworth which follows.

Wentworth is a township which forms part of the south Durban Basin, an area notorious for air pollution due to its controversially close proximity to local industry (Sparks, 2006). In essence, the general feel is that in such a space, life is cheap, for with every breath one takes one is drawn closer to death. Today, the effects of the Group Areas Act can still be clearly seen, as Wentworth is made up, mainly of people who identify as being “coloured.” In the 1960’s people belonging to this so called race group were relocated to the unused, swampy land of Wentworth. One of the primary purposes of such relocation was to provide easy access to a pool of cheap labour for the industries that were, at that point, beginning to engulf this piece of land. With career options being limited for coloured people in the apartheid era, many of the residents had little choice but to form part of this pool and accordingly work for the nearby industries as welders and boiler makers to support their families (Chari, 2006). This employment trend ironically remains present today amongst the residents of this neighbourhood. Many youth simply follow the example set by their parents and grandparents and seek similar employment when adulthood is reached (Chari, 2006).

Evidenced in the data I collected were the assertions that even the school tends to promote and in a way favour, subjects which support a career path geared towards working in industry. Living in a 21<sup>st</sup> century democratic society, options, especially concerning the future of the youth, ought to be plentiful. Indeed, options are plentiful for many a South African contemporarily, however for the youth growing up and being educated in this context it would appear that their options are fewer and further between. In a way their options are confined to a certain career path, a path which in no way opens many doors of opportunity. Such is the case as Chari (2006) has argued that the majority of the male youth of Wentworth view working in neighbouring industry as their only option upon leaving school. This, Chari (2006) contends is largely because the youth of Wentworth grow up having only been

exposed to such an option with most parents and grandparents having followed the path of working in the neighbouring industry after leaving school. Thus, the present youth are forced to face the same lack of opportunities as their parents and grandparents. As such, this community remains largely excluded from contemporary economic advances, and can thus be described as marginalised. Marginalisation, according to Young (2000) is the process by which marginalised individuals are forced to the outskirts of society and left to face material deprivation in a society where many others have plenty. Accordingly, the marginalised learners to whom I refer in my study are children of adults who have been pushed to the outskirts of society, and left to face material deprivation through exclusion from the labour force. The school from which I gathered my data is situated in a community in which unemployment and accordingly material deprivation is rather common-place. This community being that of Wentworth, as described above. Thus, referring to the learners who participated in the process of data collection as marginalised learners can, in my opinion, be justified.

Given that social justice concerns the promotion of anti-oppression, and certainly opposes marginalisation, as argued by Hardiman and Jackson (1997). I believe it justifiable indeed for me to describe the realities and experiences of the learners in my study, who are arguably prisoners of such a context, as being instances of social injustices as opposed to instances of social justice itself. The youth in this neighbourhood, in following a career path similar to that of their ancestors means that employment for them is often seasonal, as the local industries only employ residents in their masses during times of high work volumes, these periods of time are often referred to as “Shut-downs” by the locals (Chari, 2006). Accordingly, those who rely on such employment often find themselves unemployed and relying on social grants to make ends meet. These experiences push such individuals further towards the outskirts of society; for in the absence of monetary well-being little can be done in a capitalist society to improve one’s living conditions. Thus, marginalisation and accordingly social injustice becomes pervasive in the lives of the learners who participated in my study.

In 2016 a local newspaper reported a community activist describing Wentworth as the Mecca of drugs in Durban (Basu & De Jong, 2016). It was claimed by such activist that very many

drugs in South Africa come through the Durban harbour, and with Wentworth being so closely situated to the harbour, accessing these drugs is relatively easy. In a community in which poverty and unemployment is rampant, turning to drugs to ease the stress and depression associated with one's everyday reality, becomes commonplace (Seekings & Natrass, 2015). Such is likely the case in Wentworth. Driving through such neighbourhood, on a daily basis, one can often find many unemployed individuals, young and old, simply sitting on the side of the road consuming alcohol and engaging in meaningless conversation with friends and neighbours (Basu & De Jong, 2016). The school in which I gathered data for my study as well as the learners who participated in my study exist in the midst of the circumstances described above. This as the learners and their families are residents of, and the school remains situated in, this township called Wentworth. Thus, being marginalised and having to live and be educated in a context engrossed in experiences of social injustice is very often the norm for the learners who participated in my study.

### **5.3 Theme1: Aspects of Schooling which are considered by Learners as Socially Unjust**

#### **5.3.1 A Constant Exposure to Low Expectations is an Aspect of Schooling which is Socially Unjust**



**Figure 5.1: Display Cabinet containing both trophies and crockery**

*It doesn't surprise me that the trophies are kept in such a small, confined space; and in the staffroom of all places. Nobody can see them there. What motivation is there in that? Being in a place like this I feel that I need to prove people wrong and do well because so many teachers and*

*even other learners always think that we won't amount to much simply because we're from a bad neighbourhood. We are the unnecessary bunch in society; so why even bother with displaying the trophies properly? - Bianca*



**Figure 5.2: Cigarette butts along a corridor**

*I feel that if we were expected to do well academically they would at least provide a cleaner and more welcoming environment in which we could learn. Looking at those cigarette butts just left on the corridors is quite typical of the environment I am expected to succeed in. So for me, success is something I have to obtain myself, nobody will just give it to me -Erin*



**Figure 5.3: Prominent sign showing a technical area of the school**

*I know nobody will help me because in the past people haven't been very helpful, they feel as though they are wasting their time with me. It is as though we are only expected to follow one career path. A path that is in tech and not a path that is in more academic fields. That's why this school focuses mainly on technical subjects. They got a whole block for that. -Toby*



**Figure 5.4: Empty alcohol bottles outside a classroom**

*You have to keep yourself on track in order to be successful, because in this place nobody will do it for you. That picture just reminds me of how most people here don't care. I don't even drink and do stuff like that, even though most other learners do. But nobody really seems to praise me for being so good.-Daina*

*All we want is answers and solutions to our current problems that never seem to end, so we can move forward. But when I look at those bottles just left there I feel as though there will never be any solutions. So I don't feel very motivated to do well. So when I go home I don't even feel like studying.-Lawrence*

**In response to Lawrence**

*Working hard is not necessarily about studying because most people don't do that in our school, working hard can also be about listening in class and making sure you understand all aspects of each lesson before you walk out of that class.-Khethiwe*

In the extracts above it is apparent that marginalised learners, or “the unnecessary bunch in society” as mentioned by Bianca, recognise the necessity to find the ability within themselves to transcend their current situations. This is despite their being exposed to repeated instances of low expectations and little or no assistance. Correlating with Freire’s (1970) claim that individuals often engage in a pedagogy which they know best is the evidence to suggest that the teachers themselves exert low expectations on these learners.



The exertion of low expectations by the teachers is likely due to the fact that many of these teachers grew up in the exact same neighbourhood and so they too were exposed to such low expectations. Nevertheless, the desire to transcend one's current situation despite such exposure is evidenced in the assertions put forward by Erin, Toby and Daina. Each of them claim that success is something which they need to achieve themselves. In the extracts above, the learners each describe some of the circumstances surrounding their attempts at transcendence. Langland-Hassan's (2014) claim concerning accuracy in imagination when transcending prevailing circumstances through imagination itself often being regulated by the circumstances supports Deleuze's (1994) call for a realistic imaginative attitude. Nevertheless, the words of the learners above seem to suggest that transcendence of circumstances can, at times, deny regulation of imagination by prevailing circumstances. This would likely result in imaginings which are somewhat far removed from one's everyday reality. Given the prevalence of social injustices in the everyday realities of the learners in my study, an imaging far removed from one's reality, if used for the transcendence of one's circumstances, may not be an idea worth rejecting. It should possibly, rather be embraced despite Deleuze's (1994) call for realistic imaginative attitudes, otherwise the reality of constant exposure to low expectations, if allowed to hinder ways of transcendence would most certainly be a social injustice.

In the instance of Bianca, and presumably many others, the aforementioned transcendence is expressed in the form of an attempt to merely disprove claims made by those who exert low expectations on these marginalised learners on a regular basis. The claims mentioned include, but are not limited to, claims that these marginalised learners will not amount to much and that very little should be expected of them, as is evident in the words of Bianca in the extracts above.

Concerning the attainment of success despite exposure to much negativity, as I noted earlier, Erin, Toby and Daina each express the realisation that success in their cases is obtainable, but only through efforts put forward by themselves. Very little expectation of help coming from others in the attainment of success is expressed by each of them with Toby explaining that he believes nobody will help him as help is often viewed as a waste of one's time. Gustafsson (2011) as well as Bayat, Louw and Rena (2014) make reference to external factors such as

female domestic responsibilities in respect of girls and the macho culture in respect of boys hindering learners' attainment of success despite learners being self-driven to succeed. This, coupled with the fact that very little, if any help is received by the learners in my study, does indeed paint a very grim picture concerning their future attainment of academic success.

Further to Toby's assertions, Daina claims that nobody will keep her on track and Erin recognises that nobody will simply give success to her. Nevertheless, in regard to finding self-propelled means by which to achieve success Khethiwe offers a somewhat practical yet unorthodox approach to achieving academic success, claiming that working hard in order to attain success does not merely boil down to studying hard but rather requires one to simply listen in class and ensure that all aspects of each lesson are fully understood before leaving each class. Thus, an idea of, to a degree, constantly creating minor experiences of success is suggested here. Just as Freire (1970) has argued that constant experiences of being silenced make it difficult for the oppressed to gain a voice for liberation, as silence becomes the norm, it seems logical to assume that if one can have constant experiences of success, success too, can indeed become the norm. Therefore, merit is added to Khethiwe's suggestion that one ought to constantly work hard to attain success.

The extracts above each appear to give credit to the assertion that the marginalised learners in my study are constantly being exposed to low expectations and little or no help from those in positions to do otherwise. The constant exposure of these learners to such an environment is, in my view, socially unjust. The mere fact that these learners have to learn, and supposedly grow academically, let alone achieve academic success in these spaces, is asininely socially unjust.

In 2014 Brault, Janosz and Archambault (2014) conducted a study concerning teacher expectations and learner performance. Their findings suggested that constant exposure to low expectations by teachers often resulted in low levels of learner performance. Such finding was attributed to the fact that learners become complicit in what they perceive to be expected of them. I thus contend that in the instance of the learners in my study, constant

exposure to low expectations, a lack of help and little, if any, motivation on the part of those in positions to motivate can certainly be said to make for a socially unjust space of learning.

### 5.3.2 The Undesirability and Repulsiveness of School is an Aspect of Schooling Deemed Socially Unjust

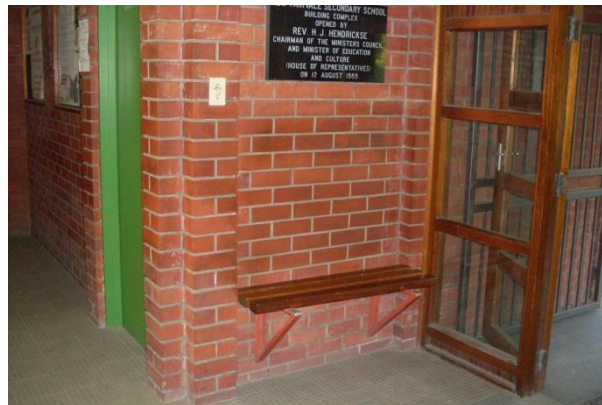


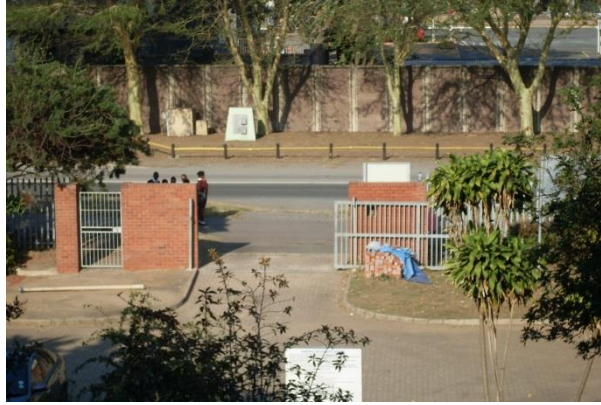
Figure 5.5: A bench outside the school's offices

*Looking at that picture, it reminds me of one day in particular. On that particular day I wasn't in the mood for school. I played sick. I had to sit in the office, on that vey bench and wait for my father to come and fetch me. Waiting around and then going home was still better than being here. Yes, it's better than being in school- **Bianca**.*

Following from Bianca's memories of sitting on the bench, Lawrence had the following to add:

*I've played sick before and I'll likely play sick again. Especially on those kind of days where there is no point in being at school because teachers are just doing revision work. It becomes very boring and most people don't pay attention anyway. I can rather stay at home and do something more constructive, like eat or something-**Lawrence***

*When I look at that picture of the bench it reminds me that all the naughty children sit there when they fight. The number of fights that take place in this school make you feel like not even coming to school most days. But when I think about it, I wouldn't mind being one of the learners involved in a fight because then I may get suspended or expelled, and others might fear and respect me. Then there's no school for me-**Raymond***



**Figure 5.6: Main gate entrance to the school**

*The picture of the gate reminds me of an experience I had. One where I was locked out of the school. You see, what happened was on this particular day I decided to come late to school. I just couldn't seem to get moving in the morning. When I got to the gate I was locked out, and that was one of the best moments in my life, because I was locked out of school. I really didn't want to be in such a boring place anyway.- Erin*

*I once heard that someone drove into that wall at night. When we came to school the next day and found out it was broken I was actually quite happy because I thought they were going to send us home. But they didn't and so I was very upset about not being sent home.-Tatum*

*Oneday while sitting in English we could see some children jumping over that wall in the picture. It was easy for them now that it was broken, and they were running away from school. I was sitting in class watching that and thinking I wish that it was me running away. I did not want to be at school, school just drains me of my energy.-Nicole*

The words of the learners in the extracts above, paint a rather grim picture concerning the desirability felt by each of them in respect of having to be in school. It seems apparent that these learners find school to be so undesirable that one may be justified in identifying a sense of learners being repulsed by the school. Many of the learners are so repulsed that they seem prepared to go to extreme lengths so as to avoid having to physically be in school. Both Bianca and Lawrence openly admitted to playing sick simply to avoid having to be in school with Lawrence being so bold as to indicate that he has every intention of using these means again so as to escape the undesirability of being in school. Bayat *et al* (2014) have suggested that “coloured” learners generally have a poor perception of the importance of schooling due to the contexts in which they are raised. Nevertheless, Alexander *et al* (2009), while highlighting the importance of governments’ intervention to combat learner poor

performance claimed that in instances where staff members lack of desire to be present at school filters through to learners, as may be the case here, intervention becomes particularly important. Many of the learners in my study do indeed belong to the so called “coloured” community, accordingly a poor perception of schooling on their part which results in their finding the idea of school undesirable certainly does not come as a surprise. However, the attitudes of many of the teachers, which has been alluded to by learners throughout the data does suggest to me that Alexander *et al*’s (2009) claims of a lack of desire to be present filtering down to learners may very well be in existence here. Hence, the mere existence of such a source of undesirability, in my view can justifiably be deemed socially unjust.

Rather than coming to school and then subsequently being sent home, Erin explained that she on one occasion “decided” to arrive at school late in the hopes of being locked out. Much to her expectations, being locked out came as a natural result of her deliberate late arrival. What is apparent from the admissions made by Bianca, Lawrence and Erin is that each of them were in fact willing to engage in some sort of dishonest behaviour in some shape or form, whether it be faking an illness or pretending to have been delayed. To think that learners would go to such great lengths simply to avoid having to be at school, may reiterate Alexander *et al*’s (2009) call for government intervention. Nevertheless, one must remain mindful of Pitt’s (1998) argument that too much intervention concerning a previously disadvantaged group of learners may breed a culture of dependency on the state. Such conditions, Pitt (1998) claims, may result in individuals taking very little responsibility for their own development. Such an occurrence is certainly not desired where one is attempting to liberate a group of previously disadvantaged learners, possibly through the freeing of their minds by means of imagination (through the use of imaginative narratives).

The learners engagements in the sort of behaviour described above were all in a desperate attempt to avoid having to be in a physical space which they found to be most undesirable and possibly repulsive. Salo’s (2005) assertion echoed by Bayet *et al* (2014) that the importance of schooling in the life of a “coloured” child in South Africa is given little regard by way of cultural norm resonates in the actions taken by these learners. Such is the case in that even though the learners likely find their school to be undesirable, the mere fact that they

have each so readily avoided it leaves me with little doubt that schooling is not ranked very high on these learners' lists of important engagements.

The words of Tatum and Nicole in the extracts above, suggest that although they may not have been dishonest, as many others were, in an attempt to avoid the undesirable space of school, they too were welcoming of rather extreme circumstances brought on by others; provided such circumstances resulted in there being no school. Tatum spared all reservations when welcoming the destruction of school property with the belief that it may negate her having to be in the so called undesirable space of school. Nicole, only after having realised the relationship between the destruction of property and a possible way to avoid being in school, also seemed to welcome and to an extent, condone such destruction. Nicole, however, appears to have taken condonation a step further by also wishing to have been one of the learners who were taking full advantage of the broken wall by easily jumping over it and so escaping from this undesirable and repulsive space.

A willingness on the part of Nicole to join learners engaging in unruly behaviour, if such behaviour would achieve the outcome of not having to be in the undesirable space, was certainly demonstrated. This idea of going along with, and condoning, the behaviour of others to achieve a desired outcome was certainly displayed by both Nicole and Tatum. Such an idea seems rather contrary to Nieuwenhuis's (2011) call for individual autonomy, after identifying individual autonomy as key in liberating the oppressed in society. Nicole and Tatum's willingness to go along with others will thus, in my view, do very little, if anything, in favour of their liberation, and may therefore hinder their ultimate attainment of academic success.

A willingness to engage in unruly behaviour, should such behaviour result in one's not having to remain in the undesirable space, was also displayed by Raymond who claimed that he would not mind being one of the naughty children. However, Raymond's words seem to suggest that he finds school to be such an undesirable space that not only was he prepared to engage in unruly behaviour to escape it, but he was prepared to accept the consequences of such behaviour, provided it got him out of this space.

Based on the above, I feel that Raymond thus brings a new dimension to this aspect of unruly behaviour serving as a means to achieve the desired ends of escaping the undesirable space. This is because although Tatum and Nicole appeared to have condoned engaging in unruly behaviour to achieve the desired outcome, no mention of consequences for their behaviour was at any point made. However, Raymond mentioned that he was prepared to accept both suspension and expulsion as a consequence. Nevertheless, I believe that one must remain cognisant of the fact that Raymond's mentioned consequences both result in him not having to be in school. They both therefore achieve a result which Raymond ultimately desired. Hence, had Raymond's consequences not achieved the ultimate result he desired I remain doubtful that he would have so eagerly accepted such consequences. However, Raymond's reference to being feared and respected bears some likeness to Gustafsson's (2011) assertion that the macho culture, which is often prevalent in high schools, may drive male learners to engage in undesirable behaviour. Accordingly, I feel it necessary to remind the reader at this juncture, of Bayat *et al's* (2014) claim that boys who deviate from the perceived norm associated with the macho culture are often ostracised and bullied. Horowitz (1997), who ran a workshop in 1997 in an attempt to determine to what extent sexism affects males arrived at a similar conclusion regarding consequences males face should they not conform to expectations exerted on them by a prevailing macho culture. Bayat *et al's* (2014) claim is accordingly neither new nor isolated. I therefore cannot help but wonder if perhaps Raymond (being male), although just like Tatum and Nicole, in that he does not want to be at school, does not merely engage in undesirable behaviour in an attempt to fit in and avoid being ostracised and bullied.

Despite my uncertainty concerning Raymond's motives what does remain a commonality amongst each of the learners, whose words were shared above, is that they each find the space of schooling to be very undesirable and possibly repulsive. In fact they find it to be so undesirable that some of them are willing to behave dishonestly, while others are prepared to condone and sometimes engage in unruly conduct. In addition, occasionally some of the learners are prepared to accept the consequences of behaving in an unruly manner if the end result would be their not having to remain in so undesirable and repulsive a space. Having to be educated in a space which is found to be so undesirable and possibly repulsive, while being presented with no alternatives other than remain in poverty and be marginalised is most certainly a social injustice. Freire's (1996) assertion that spaces of social injustice should be

transformed so as to liberate marginals who have become beings for others, trapped within a system most certainly resonates in the instances described above. It is not surprising then, that the school is considered an unjust space by the learners in my study, and as such, the space, in my opinion, should be transformed.

### **5.3.3 The Unwelcoming Nature of School is a Socially Unjust Aspect of Schooling**

In the previous sub-theme the learners' extracts suggested that their space of learning is an undesirable and sometimes repulsive one. In this sub-theme the words of the learners suggest quite adamantly that they are of the view that their space of learning is an unwelcoming one. Perhaps this feeling of not being very welcomed is but one of the presumably diverse reasons for the schooling space being described as an undesirable one. Other than Lawrence who alluded to the constant onslaught of revision work being a cause for his finding school to be so undesirable and Raymond's assertion that the frequency of fights in the school results in one not wanting to go to school, the rest of the interviewed learners in the previous sub-theme provided no explicit reasons for their assertions of school being an undesirable space.

Focusing on the present sub-theme I have noted that Sindisiwe, Daina and Toby suggested, in the following extracts, that they each found school to be a very unwelcoming space. This sense of school being an unwelcoming space may, in my opinion and in the absence of data to the contrary, be accepted as yet another reason why the schooling space was found, by the learners mentioned in the previous sub-theme, to be undesirable and repulsive. The fact that school as an unwelcoming space (the current theme) may be offered as a reason for school being described as an undesirable and repulsive space (previous theme), has motivated me, in my study, to present this current sub-theme directly subsequent to the previous one with the hope of achieving some degree of continuity in my discussion and analysis. I also feel that in presenting the two sub-themes in this manner a close relationship between the two will be highlighted in that the reader may be placed in a position to see how the one sub-theme feeds in to the other. A reason for one sub-theme feeding into the other could be because school as an unwelcoming space can very likely result in school being an undesirable and repulsive space.





**Figure 5.7: Counter at the reception**

*I was standing there at the reception on the day of registration and they couldn't find my application form. My mum shouted because there was so much security and unnecessary policies to comply with and yet now they can't find my application form. She said that they focus so much on security and policy but they can't get a simple thing like this right. That was my first day, so after that kind of start I didn't feel very welcome – **Sindisiwe***

*I got so excited when I first saw the school badge in the reception area because it just seemed so powerful. But now that I have been here for a while I think that the image of the sword is appropriate for this school because it makes me think of fights and there are a lot of fights in this school. I enjoy watching the fights, but if I had a choice I would rather not be in such an environment. And if new people knew what that badge represents, they wouldn't want to be here either, they would probably leave straight away. So much for a welcoming reception- **Daina***



**Figure 5.8: Information signs which have been turned upside down**

*I remember my first day of school like it was yesterday. The signs in the carpark were turned upside-down, pointing newbies in the wrong direction. There were a group of learners standing by the sign,*

*looking at me and laughing. They were probably hoping I would go the wrong way. So I would say that I too felt very unwelcomed on my first day.-Toby*

Both Daina and Toby suggested in their words above that their feeling unwelcomed at school can be largely attributed to the manner in which other learners conducted themselves. Daina speaks of the frequency of fights amongst other learners and the association of these fights with the image of a sword displayed in the reception area. She goes as far as asserting that if people were to arrive at the reception and subsequently make the association between the sword and the fights amongst learners as she has, such people would more than likely leave straight away. Gonsalves, Kaplan and Paltiel (2015) profess that a constant lingering of the threat of physical violence in South African schools remains a key factor which results in many an individual feeling most unwelcomed. Thus, I am inclined to argue that Daina is quite justified in her feeling unwelcomed in the midst of a frequent occurrence of fights in the school. Schools should indeed be welcoming spaces if learning is to be encouraged and promoted. Many schools in South Africa do achieve this, while sadly many fail (Meier & Marais, 2012). Nevertheless, given that the welcoming nature of schools ought to be the norm, to expect learners to learn in a space which they find unwelcoming is, in my opinion certainly a social injustice.

Toby, although also speaking of the behaviour of learners resulting in his not feeling welcomed, describes an incident somewhat more personal than Daina's association. He speaks about being the target of ridicule by other learners who more than likely changed the positioning of signs merely with the intention of confusing new comers to the school. Toby claims that his being both looked at and laughed at by these learners who tampered with the sign resulted in him feeling most unwelcomed in a space of learning, a space which should most commonly be a welcoming one.

Nieuwenhuis (2011) suggested that the transforming of contexts of teaching and learning to spaces found to be more desirable is reliant on a process which begins with a change in the hearts and minds of those involved. The learners to whom Daina and Toby each refer, and seem to blame for their feeling unwelcomed at school, would accordingly need to experience

some degree of change in their hearts and minds so as to aid the creation of a more desirable context for teaching and learning. In Daina's case those learners who often engage in fights would need to change, while in Toby's case the learners who took pleasure in confusing new comers would need to change. However, one must be reminded of Deleuze's (1994) contention that change may not be easily attained while repetition reinforces the status quo. In the instances above, the status quo being a state of constant fighting and teasing of new comers, which ultimately results in some learners having feelings of being unwelcomed.

The blame for one's feeling unwelcomed in a space of learning is shifted by Sindisiwe from the behaviour of other learners to administrative issues within the running of the school, despite her commenting on the same pictures as Daina and Toby. Sindisiwe describes the school administration's inability to locate her registration form on the day of registration as a very unwelcoming experience. The description of her mother shouting and becoming angry because despite an abundance of security at the school, and all the school's policies, on the day of registration, forms still went missing suggests misplaced priorities on the part of the school. The claim that a great focus on security is provided and yet the school still failed to secure Sindisiwe's application form can, in my view, be taken as evidence of misplaced priorities; which consequently will be the focus of my next sub-theme under this broader theme of what learners consider to be social injustices within schools and why they view school as an unjust space. However, focusing on the mention of policy, where administrative issues have resulted in one feeling unwelcomed, perhaps failure on the part of policy could be to blame as policies concerning the handling of registration forms did not seem to prevent Sindisiwe's negative experience. Gynther's (2009) claim that policy often falls short when put into practice is thus of relevance. I therefore feel inclined to suggest that schools should not get so consumed with following policy that they begin to ignore what is indeed happening in practice; especially in the instance such as the one described above, where learners are made to feel unwelcomed.

Whether blame for learners' feelings of being unwelcomed can lie with the behaviour and conduct of other learners or with poor school administration does little, if anything, to negate the fact that the learners in my study do indeed find school to be an unwelcoming space. Having to learn in a space which is felt to be very unwelcoming is most certainly a social

injustice as spaces of learning ought to be nurturing and welcoming so as to evoke one's full potential. These feelings of being unwelcomed may serve as a reason for the learners in my study finding school to be an undesirable and repulsive space, as mentioned above. In addition, apart from out of touch policies; misplaced priorities, as suggested in Sindisiwe's extract above, may in some instances result in the incubation and exacerbation of feelings of being unwelcomed. For this reason, I turn now to the next sub-theme emerging from the data, which focuses on misplaced priorities acting as social injustices.

### 5.3.4 Misplaced Priorities are a Socially Unjust Aspect of Schooling

The learners in my study allude to misplaced priorities on the part of learners and the school constituting social injustices, and so rendering school an unjust space. In the following extracts matters of finances, the use thereof, maintenance as well as facilities and the abuse thereof are mentioned. In analysing the following extracts the misplacing of priorities on the part of the school as far as allocation of funds, the provision of facilities and the maintenance of such facilities becomes apparent. However, the misplacing of priorities on the part of learners as far as the exertion of their energies is also presented, analysed and discussed.



Figure 5.9: Broken windows on a classroom

*Windows are often broken in this school. People who are not attending class are the ones who break the windows. Those who don't pay school fees are also the ones who break the windows. But there's an imbalance in the school. We have broken windows, but we still have DSTV.-Clint*

*What I can say about those broken windows is that the classes get flooded because they break the windows and push hose-pipes through the window and leave the water running overnight. The vandals, who are learners of this same school, do this. Most of them don't bother with their school work anyway, and seldom come to class. Then this flooding of the classrooms wastes time because we have to wait for the class to be cleaned by other learners. Even though I wasn't involved in the vandalism I was happy that time got wasted cleaning up, this meant less school work.-Tatum*



**Figure 5.10: Air-conditioning units which serve only selected rooms**

*They worry about aircons to make the classrooms more pleasant but what difference does it make, how do you concentrate when people right outside the school are screaming and shouting and fighting? We should rather be building better fences and walls instead of wasting money on aircons-  
**Clint***

*Talking about wasting money, what I have noticed is that people don't want to pay school fees but they come in with shoes that cost over R 1000-**Toby***

Both Clint and Tatum describe instances of vandalism in their spoken words. Through both of their descriptions it would seem apparent that the individuals who are responsible for vandalism, in the form of breaking of windows, are none-other than learners themselves. However, Clint expresses that it is a group of learners who do not attend class who engage in the breaking of windows while Tatum's description is somewhat more general, in that she simply describes the vandals as being learners themselves. It is Clint's description that is of particular interest to me because the assertion that the learners who do not bother attending class are the ones who engage in vandalism suggests, to a degree, an instance of what I would describe as "mis-placed priorities." This is because rather than prioritising the attendance of class, it would appear as though engaging in acts of vandalism, such as the breaking of windows, takes greater priority for the group of learners identified by Clint. Bloch (2009) has argued that ironically acts of vandalism are common in poorer schools which are already

lacking in resources. Thus, these acts serve to disadvantage marginalised learners further as there certainly does, according to Bloch (2009), exist an achievement gap between the “haves” and “have nots” dictated largely by the availability of resources. The exertion of one’s energies on acts of vandalism is thus an act of mis-placed priorities to me, because it seems apparent that the learners in my study already have something far greater to focus on, for instance, working towards closing the achievement gap. Certainly the destruction of what little resources are present seems to only disadvantage them further.

Although both Clint and Tatum speak of the breaking of windows as an act of vandalism, Tatum goes on to describe a further act, which is nevertheless directly linked to the breaking of the windows. She describes the pushing of hose-pipes through the broken windows so as to flood classrooms. It is this additional act that in my opinion, results in further instances of mis-placed priorities, only this time I make reference to priorities in respect of the use of one’s time and energy. Tatum makes clear that the flooding of classrooms through broken windows wastes time as other learners are then required to wait for the classrooms to be cleaned before teaching and learning can continue. Having to wait for a classroom to be cleaned before lessons may continue suggests a sort of narrow mindedness in my opinion on the part of teachers, because learning does not necessarily have to take place within the confines of a classroom. Thus, this mis-placed priority in respect of the prioritising of how time is spent, rests largely on the shoulders of teachers. Nevertheless, the fact that these acts of vandalism are committed mostly by learners who do not bother attending classes suggests an instance of misplaced priorities in respect of the use of one’s own time and energy. This is because these learners would rather use their time and energy on engaging in acts of vandalism as opposed to dedicating such time and energy to their school work as explained in Tatum’s extract above. Berliner and Glass (2014) contend that the wasting of time in educational contexts can have a profoundly negative impact on the attainment of academic success. The need for both teachers and learners to be cognisant of such an effect on the attainment of academic success thus cannot be ignored. I accordingly argue that teachers and learners should, as far as possible, attempt to avoid the mis-placing of priorities as far as the use of one’s time is concerned. In particular, this avoidance should be the case as far as teaching and learning time is concerned.

From the extracts above, there also exists misplaced priorities in respect of finances, and more particularly how finances in an already economically disadvantaged community seem to be mismanaged through a lack of prioritisation of the immediate needs of the school. Toby speaks about learners who do not pay school fees and yet they wear expensive shoes. This suggests misplaced priorities in relation to finances on the part of the learners and even their parents or guardians. Accordingly, one would be justified in contending that the community which this school serves seems to be guilty of misplacing their priorities as far as finances are concerned. In addition to Toby's reference to finances Clint speaks about air-conditioning units being installed, with an aim to create a more pleasant environment. This is done despite the fact that the environment remains far from pleasant due to disturbances in the form of screaming and shouting occurring in close proximity to where learning ought to be taking place. Clint's words regarding air-conditioning units being installed, when there are far greater problems at hand seem to suggest misplaced priorities on the part of school management, and in particular the School Governing Body, who undoubtedly decides on the use of the school's funds. Clint would thus appear justified in arguing that the funds could be better spent on erecting higher and stronger, sound proof walls as these would assist greatly in creating an environment far more conducive to teaching and learning. In essence, an environment without noise disturbance from a rowdy community amongst which the school is situated would be much more desirable than an air-conditioned environment in which one is unable to focus due to noise. Using what little finances are available to create environments more conducive to teaching and learning would certainly be in line with Hofmeyr and Nyoka's (2013) call for the using of resources in such a manner that they not only benefit present generations but serve too, to possibly benefit future generations. Bayat *et al* (2014) who have promoted the use of school budgets with sustainability in mind, would certainly be in favour of this notion to use resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

Evident in the words of Toby, Clint and Tatum is that priorities in some form have been misplaced in their school. This misplacing of priorities seems to include the prioritisation of both time and finances. Nevertheless, misplacing of one's priorities whether it be in regards to time or finances through the spoken words above, it is apparent that the result remains the same. The result simply being that education for an already marginalised and disadvantaged group of learners, is forced to take the back seat to other agendas. Whether these agendas be

amusement through the flooding of a classroom, an expression of fashion through wearing expensive shoes or the comfort and grandeur of sitting in an air-conditioned room is irrelevant to this study because ultimately this misplacing of priorities, as expressed above comes at the cost of education for an already disadvantaged group. The misplacing of priorities in contexts that lack social justice can, according to Gewirtz (1998), be considered an injustice, and in this instance I would argue it to be a social injustice. It is unsurprising then, that the learners in my study consider this misplacing of priorities to be tantamount to rendering school an unjust space.

### **5.3.5 The Doctoring of Results is a Socially Unjust Aspect of Schooling**

In South Africa, where possible schools opt for grade promotion, this takes place particularly in the lower grades. Such a practice often results in poor performance at secondary level (Bayat *et al*, 2014). Based on the extracts which follow, it seems likely that the learners in my study have indeed encountered such practices. Although not explicitly stated, the data presented below does certainly make allowances for one to speculate the existence of the doctoring of academic results. The practices described by the learners, in being suggestive of such doctoring, do indeed constitute a social injustice.

*What shocks me is that it's mainly the juniors (Grade 8 and 9) who seem to just be failing. The majority of the people who pass are in Gr 10 and up. However, I find it hard to believe that these same people who have been failing like crazy can suddenly pass when in the FET Phase. Something is very fishy- **Daina***

*In my opinion a lot of the poor performance displayed by the learners goes back to behaviour. If you're always misbehaving and bunking classes you find you usually are the one who does very badly; especially if the teachers don't like you. Many of the juniors seem to come to high school with these bad habits from their primary schools. But when a person is well behaved and the teachers like them, you find that person does well. I think it might be some sort of favouritism. -**Lawrence***

*I think the teachers just push people through the system because some of the people who do pass, they know nothing about any of their school work. You see their results and notice they made it by one percent. So I think teachers just pass some of them to get rid of them-**Raymond***



The spoken words of Daina, Lawrence and Raymond tend to suggest a sort of doctoring of learners' results. On the one hand both Daina and Raymond suggest that learners' marks are possibly increased so as to push them through the system. Yet, on the other hand Lawrence, who does seem to concur with both Daina and Raymond in that he also believes marks, are at times, increased; nevertheless takes the discussion a step further. Lawrence goes on to suggest that not only are marks increased as a result of what he refers to as "favouritism" but that marks are sometimes decreased in respect of learners who are considered badly behaved. He adds that this is particularly the case if teachers do not like a certain learner. Trusz (2017) proffers that teachers who exercise their power in such a manner adversely affect both the emotional and academic development of learners who find themselves on the receiving end of such practices. The chances of attaining academic success in the long term would therefore be reduced in respect of the learners in my study should they fall victim to teachers practicing methods of "favouritism." I therefore feel inclined to argue that although the reducing of learners' marks may act as a form of punishment for misbehaviour, such a practice should not be desired, particularly when dealing with already marginalised learners whose academic performances for the most part, leave much to be desired.

From the words shared above, it thus becomes apparent that the learners in my study perceive a doctoring of results not just to increase them with the aim of pushing poorly performing learners through the system, but also to decrease marks as a sort of punishment for learners who are badly behaved. As unethical, and as socially unjust as the doctoring of results may seem, shockingly, doctoring of results, is at times, required by teachers through policies which are in place in an already existing system. Bayat *et al* (2014) have argued that schools often face departmental sanctions when learners perform poorly, and as a result of this, many schools simply opt to doctor results so as to avoid such sanctions. Given that sanctions are often implemented through policy, Nieuwenhuis (2011) seems justified in describing the implementation of sanctions through policy as one of many instances where policy falls short of practice and so exacerbates inequality in an already unequal system. This, I would argue, is a social injustice, and it is to such instances which my attention shifts in the following sub-theme.

### 5.3.6 Impractical Policy is a Socially Unjust Aspect of Schooling

There exists a Policy of only being able to hold learners back once per phase. Such policy, according to Bayat *et al* (2014) is not practical as the end result is ill-equipped learners in higher grades, which ultimately causes a high failure rate in these grades. What then happens, is that schools which achieve a Grade 12 pass rate of less than 60 %, are categorised as underperforming schools. These schools are then sanctioned. Thus, to avoid such sanctioning, not to mention the embarrassment of being categorised as an underperforming school, in some instances results over which the school has control (continuous assessment marks etc.) are altered so as to give poorly performing learners the edge they require to pass the grade (Bayat *et al*, 2014). However, in other instances results are lowered so as to prevent poorly performing learners from entering Grade 12 and accordingly tarnishing the reputation of the school. Nevertheless, following from the previous sub-theme, the learners in my study, as becomes apparent in the words below, seem to be somewhat aware of such practices, or at the very least, have great suspicions that such practices are in existence.

*If you compare my marks here in high school to how I performed in primary school, you see a major drop in my marks. That's the case with most people here. It could be because there's such a huge change in the work and what is expected of you once you get to high school. And then again in Grade 10 you find it gets very difficult because it's like a whole new ball game from before, and many people in Grade 10 just got pushed up from Grade 9. But I know when I get to Gr 12 I will pass because most people who get to write the Gr 12 exams miraculously pass the year. Those who don't pass Gr 12 usually drop out of school in Gr 10 or 11. I think they are forced to leave, rather than do Gr 12 and embarrass the school.-Erin*

*I personally don't think that the previous grades really prepare you for what is to come in the final phase of your schooling. You keep on passing in the lower grades, but you don't really understand the work anyway. So most people, myself included really battle and perform quite poorly at the higher grades. But if you make it into Grade 12, and many don't make it in this school, you find that you end up passing. I don't know how that happens, but at least it gives me hope.-Lawrence*

*It's a major adjustment from gr9 to Gr 10 because now we are specialising. And I personally feel there is a gap in knowledge between the two grades. So if people who are top of the class are battling imagine how much worse it is for those who were just pushed up. And there are so many of those in this school- Britany*

Both Britany and Erin make reference to an increase in the level of intensity regarding school work once one gets to Grade 10. Also common in their spoken words is the suggestion that some learners merely get “pushed up” to Grade 10 from Grade 9 and then find themselves battling tremendously with the academic work. Such instances of learners being “pushed up” have been highlighted by Bayat *et al* (2014), above, who goes on to describe those instances as a meagre attempt by schools to avoid embarrassment. However, Erin’s discussion differs from Britany’s in that she (Erin) makes specific reference to the great likelihood of one passing Grade 12 should one be allowed entry into Grade 12 in the first place. It is in respect of this aspect of being allowed entry and the accompanying increased likelihood of passing Grade 12 that Erin’s discussion begins to correspond more with the spoken words of Lawrence.

Lawrence, just like Erin seems to recognise the fact that very few learners in his school make it into Grade 12, but of the few who do make it, a surprisingly large majority tend to pass. However, Lawrence’s discussion, as far as the implication of the doctoring of results is concerned, seems somewhat more innocent and perhaps naïve than Erin’s. This is because although Lawrence does acknowledge his awareness of the fact that those who make it in to Grade 12 miraculously pass the year, he does express that he does not know how this is possible, but looks at the occurrence as one from which he can take away some hope for himself regarding his own academic performance. On this matter of not allowing learners into Grade 12 if they are deemed likely to perform poorly, Hastings and Weinstein (2007) contend that such a practice only serves to disadvantage a generally already disadvantaged group of learners even further. This is because poor academic performance, according to Hastings and Weinstein (2007) seems to be more common place amongst groups identified as the generally marginalised and disadvantaged in society, for example learners of colour and from economically poorer backgrounds, as opposed to the white middle class. These claims thus correlate with a later assertion made by Bloch (2009) who contended that a second system of education exists in respect of learners from economically poorer backgrounds and this system then traps these learners behind the massive blocks of the second economy, in this instance, albeit through the implementation of impractical policy. If the implementation of impractical policies has so dire an effect on learners’ academic performance, then such implementation can most certainly be identified as an aspect of social injustice within schools.

Erin, unlike Lawrence, explicitly mentions her suspicion that those who do not make it to Grade 12 are forced to leave school at an earlier Grade rather than embarrass the school in Grade 12. It is this suspicion that leads me to believe that Erin's understandings of the happenings at school concerning the doctoring of results are somewhat less naïve and possibly worldlier than Lawrence's. The fact that Erin alludes to the school being embarrassed by those who write Grade 12 and perform badly ties in with Figlio and Rouse's (2006) assertion that the categorisation of a school based merely on Grade 12 results can in fact be a driving force behind why schools opt to doctor results in the first place.

The doctoring of results takes one back to the assertion made by Bayat *et al* (2014), in my literature review chapter, that schools tend to doctor results so as to avoid the sanctions imposed on them should they, in accordance with policy, be categorised as a poor performing school. Nevertheless, the doctoring of results to avoid sanctions simply because policy would dictate that a school must be categorised as "poorly performing" tends to, in my opinion, serve as a gross injustice in respect of both learners who are grade promoted earlier through doctoring marks upwards only to have the learners battle latter as well as learners who are held back, or forced to leave school through doctoring marks downwards.

It is my contention that both categories of learners, mentioned above, are victims of the practice of result doctoring as the former are placed in a difficult position in the higher grades which could result in their performing very badly where it matters most, as far as one's future is concerned. Thus, rendering the former category of learners very vulnerable in society. Such vulnerability exists with respect to their trying to enter tertiary study, and the work force. This contention can be supported by the works of Bloch (2009) who asserted that the exposing of already vulnerable learners to a second system of education only serves to increase their vulnerability when attempting to enter the workforce where they would have to compete with their more advantaged counterparts.

The latter category, to which I make reference above, having been forced to leave school at Grade 10 or Grade 11 also find themselves in a very vulnerable societal position when trying to find employment or pursue further study. This is because contemporarily, a growing trend

in South Africa is that potential employers are able to choose from larger and larger pools of highly qualified individuals, thus leaving people with little or fewer qualifications with an ever-decreasing chance of obtaining employment (Shindler & Fleisch, 2007). I thus arrive at the conclusion that both categories of learners, who already belong to a marginalised and vulnerable community, are, through the practices of result doctoring, marginalised further on a societal level. It should be noted, as an aside, that Hardiman and Jackson (1997) have averred that oppression occurs at three levels, the three levels being individual, institutional and societal. Both categories of learners, as identified above, are therefore more likely to be oppressed in the near future, and so imagining circumstances that may prevent such marginalisation from occurring is necessitated in my study. Policy which has a tendency to promote the doctoring of results can most certainly be justified as being considered socially unjust by the learners in my study.

### **5.3.7 Categorisation is a Socially Unjust Aspect of Schooling**

As was evident in the sub-theme above, policy can at times drive schools to engage in less than desirable practices so as to avoid certain categorisation. In this sub-theme the idea of categorisation itself operating as a social injustice is presented through the words of the learners in my study. Spaul (2011) has argued that being categorised as an underperforming school tends to demotivate both staff and learners, and such demotivation often results in further poor academic performance. The idea of categorisation, along with the learners' words relating directly to it will, in the following paragraphs, be analysed and discussed.

*Many people don't really expect me to do well, even people in my family don't expect much. In my life it's only my mother who does expect it. Well, I don't know if she expects it or if she wants it. I barely passed last year and my mother was like the only one who kept saying no I must try harder, I can do better. In this school everyone does so badly that I doubt anyone really expects anything different-**Lawrence***

*When I'm with my friends we don't really talk about school or doing well. I'm just at school to do what I have to and then go, nobody worries too much about this kind of stuff. I guess everyone feels we're just going to do badly anyway since most people in this school do badly-**Zac***

*My friends and I also don't really talk about school work. They may ask what I want to become but the link between that and school performance is never really discussed. They don't seem very interested in school stuff. I agree, I don't think anyone thinks we will do well, so there's no point in talking about it.- Nicole*

*My aunty, being my only guardian since the death of my parents does want me to do well, she comes up with all kinds of lectures and stuff, but she's the only one who pushes me. No-one else does, everyone else, even my uncle is like whatever. With so few people motivating you, you lose your desire to perform well- Khethiwe*

*My class teacher actually tells us we're going to fail and the other learners don't even try to rebut that statement. They have just accepted it as their fate- Clint*

Each of the learners whose words have been shared in the extracts above seem to express quite clearly that very little is expected of them by those surrounding them. Whether these low expectations have been expressed by family members, as is the case with Lawrence and Khethiwe, or with friends, as is the case with Zac and Nicole, or even teachers, as explained by Clint, one thing does remain common amongst each of the learners whose words are shared above. The commonality is the mere fact that they have already been placed, in the minds of those whom they mention, in a category of learners who are not likely to perform very well academically. Thus, the perceived potential of these learners is often limited through constant exposure of a material reality, over which they have little control. Deleuze (1994) expostulates that in order to divorce oneself from such reality, the use of imagination is often required. Imagination then, according to Deleuze (1994) begins to open the possibility for one to transcend limitations of one's material reality despite having been constantly exposed to such reality. The learners in my study, having already been exposed to low expectations as a result of categorisation are thus, in my view, left with little alternative, if any, but to imagine a reality different from their material one if they are to begin to transcend the limitations characteristic of their material reality. Transcendence through imagination in the face of limitations resulting from categorisation is thus what I am inclined to argue for in my study.

In summary of the above, having been placed in a category of learners who are unlikely to perform well academically, little or no motivation is given to them by the people who most typically surround these learners on a daily basis. Apparent in this occurrence is the fact that

once learners have, for whatever reasons, been categorised as poor academic performers very little is then expected of them. The desire to perform well is thus lost, as so eloquently expressed by Khethiwe who stated, “*With so few people motivating you, you lose your desire to perform well.*” In addition to Khethiwe’s assertion, Spaul (2011) proclaims that the categorisation of learners as “underperforming” tends to perpetuate learner poor performance. I, at this juncture, am thus inclined to argue that the categorisation of the learners in my study as “poor academic performers” and the associated low expectations and lack of motivation, which ultimately destroys any desire to perform well in a group of learners belonging to an already disadvantaged and marginalised community, perpetuates their poor performance. Such categorisation is therefore, in my view, undoubtedly a social injustice.

## **5.4 Theme 2: Learners Experiences of what they View as Social Injustices within School**

### **5.4.1 Learners Experience Blocking of their Paths to Success and View this as a Social Injustice**

The blocking of one’s path to success is a common experience for the learners in my study. Blocking of success, according to the learners whose words are shared below, can be both physical and psychological, as will become apparent in the analysis which follows. The idea of learners’ paths to success being blocked does seem to correlate with Bloch’s (2009) postulation that learners who fall into the less wealthy class of society tend to face being blocked by what he calls, the massive blocks of a second economy. In addition to Bloch’s (2009) postulation, Abrego and Ganzales (2010), in an article concerning vulnerable groups in society, have averred that when an already vulnerable group of young individuals are faced with both physical and psychological blocking of their paths to success, they do indeed become even more vulnerable. It would thus, according to Abrego and Ganzales (2010), be a gross injustice if those in positions of influence failed to act to protect an already vulnerable group. Nicole, Zak, Tatum, Khethiwe and Clint each share their unique experiences in the extracts which follow. It is hoped that the following extracts will indeed shed some light on why the blocking of paths to success can be viewed as a social injustice.



**Figure 5.11: The school's bell**

*When I look at that picture I can't help but think of what happens everytime the bell rings. You find there's just this big rush and everybody's running down. But you get a bunch of people who just stand aimlessly in the middle of nowhere. They block the path for us, it's bad especially when you're rushing for physics. If you're late for class you get locked out. I hate being locked out of physics because it's a subject I really need for my future. –Nicole*

*While running after the bell rang a girl hit her head on the fire hydrant and people were forming a huge crowd and laughing at her. The whole corridor was blocked because of a silly thing like that. Also, boys come and bust those pipes by the fire hydrant so the water will go down onto the lower floors. They find that amusing. We then end up wasting time trying to get around the mess instead of just going straight to our next class. I feel it's wrong for them to do this because it's right outside that teacher's classroom and she's an old lady-Zac*

*Talking about that bell, it reminds me of oneday when we had loadshedding<sup>3</sup> so the bell didn't ring, so they had to ring a manual bell and it sounded so funny, everyone laughed at the sound, and people especially laughed at the learner who had to ring the bell, cling, cling, cling,cling,cling!!!! But that caused a lot of disruption within the school as nobody was taking the bell seriously so movement from one class to the next was very slow. Then because of that general atmosphere, learners were rowdy in classes as well. Most of the teachers got annoyed and just gave up trying to teach. Most learners were enjoying that disruption and the idea of not doing any work. But I feel valuable time for learning was wasted all because of a bell not working due to loadshedding.-  
**Tatum***

In response to Tatum's remarks Khethiwe had the following to say:

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<sup>3</sup> "Loadshedding" is a popular practice in South Africa which involves the cutting off of an electricity supply to an area for a period of time, usually one to two hours in length. This is done to reduce the load on the electricity generating plants.



*I remember that day. I wasn't laughing at the sound the bell made because it brought back memories of my primary school days. I went to a rural school and they always used a bell like that. So when I heard these other learners laughing I thought what a spoiled bunch- **Khethiwe***



**Figure 5.12: The school's workshop**

*Looking at the picture of the workshop, it reminds me of what often happens there. Most days we are supposed to be doing a practical in the workshop, but a group of learners will find an old soccer ball in the workshop. They will start playing soccer and encourage others to join them. So we just end up playing soccer instead. I do enjoy playing soccer, but when you think about it you get annoyed because I know I should rather be focusing on my school work so that I can be successful. So, I really feel that this kind of attitude of wanting to play instead of work gets in the way of my success. **-Clint***

In analysing data relating to why learners view school as a socially unjust space, the idea that one's path to success is blocked, seemed to emerge quite clearly. In the extracts above, both Nicole and Zac make reference to the physical blocking of one's path to success. Nicole speaks about learners who stand around aimlessly after the ringing of the bell to signify movement to the next class. She claims that in doing so these learners physically block the path of other learners who are eager to move from one class to another. This is particularly problematic for Nicole when she is attempting to move to her physics class, as a late arrival to this class, according to her, results in one being locked out of the classroom. Nicole acknowledges, in her spoken words, the significance of this particular class in relation to her being successful in her future. Thus, her being locked out of this class through other learners

physically blocking her path to the class can be viewed as a way in which her path to success is blocked. This act of others who are in a vulnerable group themselves, as identified by Abrego and Ganzales (2010), blocking paths to success of fellow vulnerable beings resonates all too well with Freire's (1996) contention that oppression is imposed not only by the society oppressing the alienated, but also by members of the alienated group themselves, likely because they know no better. Such is the case, Freire (1970) argued in his earlier works where oppression takes place through an act of knowing, in the instance above, the learners knowing no better comes to the fore. They thus, likely see little oppressive, if anything, in their actions of blocking other vulnerable learners' paths to success.

Zac, in his extract above, makes reference to being physically prevented from moving to his next class due to a large crowd being formed for the sole purpose of standing around and laughing at a learner who had been injured. Zac, in his words, considers this to be a very silly reason for one's path to the next class being blocked. Mention of the fire hydrant, as this was the object on which the learner in Zac's extract was injured, reminded Zac of yet another physical blocking of one's path to success. Zac went on to speak about how learners deliberately break the water pipes on the fire hydrant which ultimately results in yet another physical blocking of one's path from one class to the next. Again, the description of the learners' behaviours presented above, suggests a profound correspondence with Freire's (1996) notion of marginals not existing outside a structure, but rather inside a structure which has made them beings for others, a structure in which they often perpetuate their own oppression which ultimately serves to disempower themselves further while benefiting those already in the dominant group in society.

It is apparent that the behaviour of these learners disadvantages fellow marginals to the extent that their quality of education is affected because not being able to attend classes would in fact be very detrimental to one's future prospects of academic success. Thus, in the greater society these marginals are then disempowered as accessing further study and/or employment which may place one in a better economic position is hindered. Nevertheless, this, in a way, "self-exclusion" from being able to compete with wealthier counterparts post-schooling only serves to benefit these wealthier counterparts as they (the wealthier counterparts), then face less competition in the job market. The reduction of competition in the job market, Bloch

(2009) argues only serves to perpetuate economic inequalities in South Africa. The learners in my study are therefore, in correspondence with the works of Freire (1996) existing as beings for others, in this case for the benefit of others, inside an already existing structure. Structural transformation, I would argue, is therefore necessitated.

Tatum and Clint tend to shift the focus away from a physical blocking of one's path to success towards a more attitude-related blocking of one's path to success. Tatum speaks about how loadshedding resulted in the use of a manual bell which then gave rise to disruption within the school as learners were highly amused by the sound of this bell. That amusement, then led to their moving slowly from one class to another and then ultimately misbehaving in the classrooms. Tatum claims that the general atmosphere created by the amusement with the bell resulted in learners not wanting to work and this then created an attitude of not learning. Such an attitude and atmosphere, according to Tatum, resulted in much valuable learning time being wasted. Clint, after referring to a picture of the school workshop, was reminded of what he claims to be a common occurrence within the workshop. He spoke about how learners are often distracted by an old soccer ball, with such distraction usually resulting in their playing soccer as opposed to engaging in their school work. Clint goes as far as making the assertion that the attitude evident in his recollection, of preferring play instead of working, blocks his path to academic success. Weissberg, Owen, Jenkins and Harburg (2003) in examining variables which contribute to academic success have noted that when students display attitudes that foster their shifting of attention away from academics and towards other activities, such as play, a dramatic decrease in academic performance is observed. Thus, Tatum and Clint's references to a more attitude-related blocking of one's path to success certainly have merit in my study. I would even go as far as arguing that this attitude which fosters play over academic focus does in some way influence the learners' imaginative attitudes. This is because, to me, choosing play over academics, as typical as it may be amongst youth, serves to limit academic success, and unsurprisingly too the learners in my study did indeed demonstrate some degree of limitations inherent in their imaginative attitudes. Deleuze (1994) has argued that realisms experienced by individuals often result in somewhat limited imaginative attitudes in respect of the same individuals who have experienced limited realisms. The learners in my study, evidenced in the words above, have in fact experienced somewhat limited realisms as far as academics and academic success is concerned. Such realisms may have been in the form of laughing at the sound of a bell or

playing with an old soccer ball rather than focusing on school work. Nevertheless, these limited realisms have resulted in a limited imaginative attitude, as will become apparent when covered in greater detail in theme five of my data analysis which deals with imagination in particular.

Evident in the words above is the fact that the learners in my study are of the view that their paths towards academic success are, at times, blocked. In the instances of Zac and Nicole a physical blocking of success is apparent as they report learners physically blocking their movement from one class to another. Whereas in the instances of Tatum and Clint the blocking of their academic success takes place through the prevailing attitudes of not wanting to learn, displayed by many a learner; coupled with an atmosphere of not learning. I thus note a less physical and more psychological blocking of one's success in the latter instances discussed above. Nevertheless, in all instances described and analysed above, it remains apparent that the learners in my study view school as a socially unjust space because it is, in their views, a space in which one's academic success is blocked in one way or another. I am of the contention that the learners can be justified in their views because, as expressed above, Abrego and Ganzales (2010) have emphasised how vulnerability increases drastically when marginal beings in society are subjected to blocking of their paths to success. The mere fact that such blocking is experienced in a school, the very place in my view, where paths to success should be paved rather than blocked; and to have it happen in respect of an already marginalised group, can most certainly be viewed as a social injustice.

## 5.4.2 Learners Experience Having to Witness the Prevalence of Chaos and Unruly Behaviour as a Social Injustice



Figure 5.13: A popular hangout area during break times

*All the bad things in this school happen there. That is a popular space for misbehaviour. That's where you'll get hit in the face with a ball for no reason at all. People sell all their drugs there. When the teachers come around the corner they all just run and hide. If you're in the way when they're running you'll get pushed over and hurt.-Toby*



Figure 5.14: Inside the girls' lavatory

*I remember there once was a fight in the girls' toilets, all the girls were running in to see it. Boys ran in too to see the fight also. There was no order, anyone and everyone was just running in and out of the girls' toilet. It was fun to see hair being pulled out.-Clint*

*Once the girls toilets were closed so we had to use the boys toilets. It was nice to see what it looked like in there. But the boys were standing outside their toilet instead of going to their classes and*

they were making jokes about it, saying if you want something, it's for free. They were all just standing there and causing quite a disturbance. - **Nicole**

People go and hide in the toilets and smoke. Mainly in the senior toilets, but in the mornings you sometimes smell smoke in the junior toilets too- **Sindi**

Disgusting saliva on the floor is also a common sight in the toilets. People just spit anywhere. It doesn't only happen in the toilets, I was once outside the LO class on the ground floor, and someone spat on me from above. I was so angry and embarrassed at the same time. -**Sindi**

Once someone spat on a teacher's head and when she came up there to where we were, I didn't know what to do, I didn't want to be blamed so I took off my glasses because I feel I look different without them so she wouldn't recognise me. There were a group of boys laughing so she blamed them and sent them all to the principal's office- **Khethiwe**



Figure 5.15: A notice of some of the school rules

When I walk around the school and see posters like that, I just get annoyed. For instance, this poster was a waste of time because the kids in the school will never stop smoking. Rules mean nothing to them. So I feel annoyed just looking at it. -**Khethiwe**

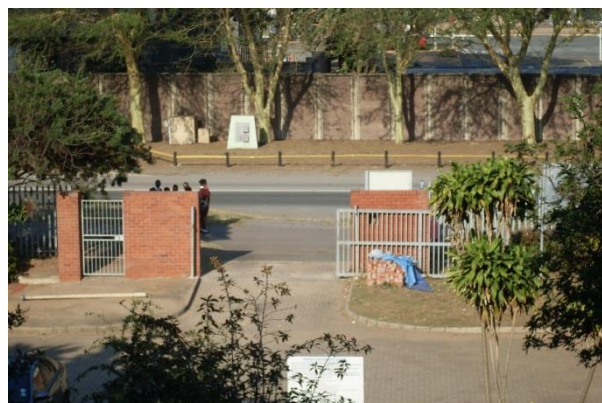


Figure 5.16 School Main Gates

*There was a boy, a few months ago, who was bleeding by the gate. He was screaming he's going to "fuck up someone" We were scared to go by him because he looked crazy. However, it was not the first time I have seen something like that over here, and I doubt it will be the last-Khethiwe*

In the extracts above, the learners in my study have spoken about the prevalence of chaos and unruly behaviour within school and how these contribute towards their viewing school as a space in which they experience social injustices. Hargreaves and Reid (2011) who wrote about disaffection from schools listed unruly behaviour and chaos within schools as being symptomatic of schools lacking in action as far as step-taking to curb such occurrences is concerned. They argued that the general environment deteriorates within schools, and this to me, would naturally result in the formation of spaces in which social justice is likely lacking.

After looking at a picture of a specific area on the school grounds, Toby recalled how popular that space is for misbehaviour. He claimed that not only is it a hazardous place, as one may be physically injured in it, but that it is also a common area for the sale of drugs. Chubb and Moe (2011) argue that dealing of drugs in schools only serves to poison a learning environment, thus creating a space that is generally non-conducive to teaching and learning. Thus, in my view a very socially unjust space exists. Toby went on to describe how chaos ensues when teachers approach this area as learners begin to rapidly disperse, claiming that such chaos may result in one being injured if not careful. Not only then, is the space socially unjust but hazardous too. Sakai & Kikuchi (2009) who write about factors which demotivate learning have suggested that external factors, such as hazardous schooling environments often result in the formation of internal factors, such as a lack of self- motivation, which may hinder academic performance. Thus, a hazardous chaotic space, as described by Toby would undoubtedly, in my opinion, foster not just social injustice, but also the occurrence of learner poor performance.

Remaining with the issue of chaos, when shown a picture of the girls' toilet, Clint recalled a fight which broke out there. He described how learners of both genders were running in and out of the girls' toilet to witness the fight, in a manner which he described as "no order." Although both Toby and Clint speak of instances of chaos, an element of unruly behaviour

cannot be ignored. This is because in Toby's account, reference is made to the selling of drugs and the physical injuring of learners whilst Clint refers to a fight breaking out. Reyes and Villarreal (2016) who have written about how easily the marginalisation of unruly learners can occur, have contended that often unruly behaviour within schools results in teachers and others in positions of authority simply excluding an already marginalised group of learners from activities of learning as a quick fix to the problem of unruly behaviour. Such a practice most certainly flies in the face of the "Every Child Matters" (ECM) policy practiced in the UK, as described by Alexander *et al* (2009) in my literature review chapter.

While exclusion from learning activities was not the case in my study, a related point raised by Reyes and Villarreal (2016) was of significance in my view, the point being that of how much easier it becomes for teachers to lower their expectations of such learners. The lowering of expectations is then, often impactful on learners' general academic performance, as they too begin to feel demotivated. Thus, a rather vicious cycle seems to ensue, the cycle being that of unruly behaviour on the part of the learners, which leads to teachers' lowering of expectations, which then leads to demotivation on the part of the learners, and feeling demotivated likely increases the chances of learners engaging in unruly behaviour. One thus begins to see how the witnessing of chaos and unruly behaviour can indeed be viewed as a social injustice within school.

Also related to unruly behaviour are the accounts expressed by Nicole, Sindisiwe and Khethiwe. Nicole described an instance in which boys were standing around outside their toilet and causing a general disturbance merely because girls were forced to use the boys' toilet as a result of plumbing issues. Sindisiwe explained how many learners use the toilets as a place to engage in smoking as well as certain, what she calls "disgusting activities," such as spitting on the floor. She then went on to describe how that sort of behaviour then spills out of the toilets into the rest of the school, alluding to an occurrence in which someone spat on her head. Following from Sindisiwe's account of people spitting on her head, Khethiwe recalled an instance in which a teacher's head was spat on.



What does seem apparent in the midst of the chaos and confusion described above is that clearly, very little regard is shown towards fellow human beings. I state this because spitting on the head of another speaks volumes about how one views others, and even perhaps oneself. Ramphele (2008) argued that through constant exposure to oppressive instances one inevitably begins to view oneself, as well as others with whom one associates, in lower esteem than would ordinarily be expected. I am thus inclined to argue that this is the case here. These learners appear to be trapped in a structure of oppression and through constant exposure to such structure, they inevitably view themselves and those around them in lower esteem than one might expect.

Inhumane and undignified treatment of others within structures of oppression, Ramphele (2008) contends often becomes normalised. Accordingly, regarding learners who engage in the activities described above, spitting on the heads of others who are viewed in lower esteem may not be seen as a taboo, but rather somewhat normalised within the prevalent oppressive structure. In the accounts mentioned above, unruly behaviour certainly seems to be prevalent. This unruly behaviour as well as the chaos described by Toby and Clint can certainly justify learners' viewing their having to witness such occurrences as a socially unjust experience.

### **5.4.3 Learners Experience a Schooling Environment Riddled with Distractions and View this as a Social Injustice**



Figure 5.17: The tuck shop

*I was standing there, waiting to buy something to eat and there was this really hot guy who greeted me. It is very common for people to flirt at the tuck shop. Also, the fact that it is so out in the open means that many people can see who is there and what is going on; so if you want to “run into” someone as soon as you see they are there, you can just run down to the shop and pretend that you were going there too. Anyway, I was so distracted with this guy whom I deliberately “ran into” there that as I turned, I fell. I felt very embarrassed because many people could see what just happened.- **Khethiwe***



**Figure 5.18: A view of nearby industry from the school**

*The sight of industry nearby and immediately in the background does distract me when at school. You see it clearly when at school, it’s literally just across the street from the school so it becomes a part of your schooling life. There was once a fire at the refinery. I was excited to see something different but I was afraid at the same time that we may blow up. This fear of blowing up plays on my mind at times while I am at school, I just know I’m going to think about it constantly- **Clint***

Adding to Clint’s account:

*Oh yes! That Refinery is a distraction. I remember the fire at the refinery. That day People were taking pictures and sending them to each other. Noboby was concentrating on school work, in fact I don’t think any work got done that day. Even a few days after that, people were talking about the fire and basically wasting whole periods just talking about it- **Britany***



Figure 5.19: Inside a classroom familiar to some participants

*I like going to that class to laugh at the teacher because she has a lisp. I didn't always laugh at her, but my friends pointed this out to me, and they were always laughing, so I just joined in. I find that lisp to be distracting because I just want to laugh at her all the time-**Tatum***

*We get to eat our food in her class because that teacher doesn't notice anything, so we have a whole food ritual in that class whenever we go there. **Zac***

Responding to Zac, Erin had the following to say:

*Yes, that teacher really doesn't notice anything. We were in that classroom, it's a life Science class and because it's a life science class there are lots of funny things hanging around the class, human organs etc. It makes some people feel sick, but others sit and laugh at it. So you have some people laughing at the lisp and others laughing at the human organs. But then you get other learners who still eat in that class, they don't feel sick. They sit and have a little picnic at the back during the lesson and lots of people join them even if they didn't bring anything, because this teacher doesn't notice anything. In an environment like that I end up just sitting and laughing at everything around me too, the whole situation is so funny. So to me, that whole classroom and any period spent in there is a distraction- **Erin***

In the accounts explained by Khethiwe, Tatum, Zac and Erin the distractions to which they each allude appear to be self-sought after distractions in that they each, through some act or another, divert their attentions to what they have identified as being distractions. Khethiwe's distraction occurs in a location which can be avoided, as going to a tuck shop is not a compulsory activity in the day of a high school learner. There thus appears, in my view, to

be a culture which embraces distractions in the school. Gruenert and Whitaker (2017) who have written about how school cultures originate, postulate that a single person cannot create a culture, but rather cultures are reflected through commonalities in the personalities of a group of people. Khethiwe demonstrates the existence of such a culture as she is free to avoid the space in which she experiences her distraction, but chooses not to do so.

Contrary to the above, Tatum, Zac and Erin experience their distractions in a location which cannot be avoided, as the attending of a life science class is, however, more often than not, compulsory in an ordinary day of a high school learner. Nevertheless, each of the four learners engaged in some physical action which in one way or another induced their distraction. Gruenert and Whitaker (2017) have suggested that school culture has the ability to have a tremendous impact on student achievement. A culture which embraces distractions within the school would likely have an adverse effect, for the purposes of my study, on what I call learner performance. It can safely be argued then, that attempting to achieve academic success in the midst of a school culture which embraces distractions would undoubtedly be a mammoth task to say the least. A likely result, in my opinion, would be learner poor performance. Accordingly, a school environment riddled with distractions can indeed be viewed as a social injustice.

Khethiwe described an instance in which she, by choice, placed herself in an area on the school property that is known for aiding deliberate rendezvous between learners of opposite sexes behind a façade of, in her words randomly ‘running into’ each other. Although Khethiwe makes mention of the fact that a male to whom she was physically attracted was at this particular place, and so his being there was what ultimately distracted her, one can neither ignore the fact that Khethiwe placed herself in that particular location by choice, after seeing the said male there, nor can one ignore the fact that such a location exists within the school. This location has been described by Khethiwe as being notorious for such rendezvous, and accordingly, I feel it incumbent upon myself to attribute the notoriety of the location to a social construction prevalent amongst learners in the school. This is because a location which simply houses a school tuck shop would usually have no significance in relation to the rendezvous of learners of opposite sexes if the learners themselves did not associate this location with such rendezvous. This social construction, in my view, can be

linked to Deleuze's (1994) claim concerning the difficulty with which one moves understandings, perhaps in this instance, the understanding of a space, away from a material reality to which one has become accustomed. In the absence of freedom of imagination, coupled with the presence of an influential and prevalent school culture, as argued by Gruenert and Whitaker (2017) it is my contention that Khetiwe, and others in similar circumstances would find it very difficult to deconstruct the social construction feeding into the notoriety of a space which simply houses a school tuck shop. Being distracted through such a construction which is so difficult to break, in a space that ought to be for teaching and learning, can certainly be viewed as a social injustice.

In respect of Tatum, Zac and Erin, they do not deliberately physically place themselves in a location in which they know distractions will occur, as was the case with Khethiwe. However, they induce their distractions by admittedly taking pleasure in them, and based on their accounts, I suspect they go as far as anticipating their distractions. It is through this anticipation that one can deduce that they very often seek their described distractions when physically present in the classroom in which they claim many of their distractions occur. Their distractions seem to centre on the general happenings in a particular teacher's life science classroom; happenings which can largely be attributed to the manner in which the classroom is run by such teacher.

Allen, Chinsky, Larcen, Lochman and Selinger (2017) whose work focuses on classroom management, proffer that when teachers become complacent in their classroom management styles, likely due to the fact that a style has worked for many years, learners tend to take the liberty of seeking distractions amongst other misbehaviours, and sadly a correlation amongst complacent styles of classroom management, the seeking of distractions and poor academic performance seems to exist. Such is likely the case in the instances described above as the life sciences teacher has been teaching in the school for many years and several learners have described the same or similar happenings in that classroom. Nevertheless, what is of particular significance to me is indeed Allen *et al's* (2017) assertion that the seeking of distractions in the midst of complacent classroom management styles often results in poor academic performance. This is because such an occurrence, in my view, only serves to

disadvantage learners further, and as such an environment conducive to distractions, such as the one described above, can certainly be viewed by learners as a social injustice.

Tatum finds the Life Sciences teacher's lisp to be a distraction, she admittedly laughs at the teacher's lisp while in her classroom. I therefore cannot help but wonder if it is not Tatum's desire to laugh, and likely her anticipation of hearing the lisp that acts as a distraction, rather than the mere lisp itself. Whereas both Zac and Erin make reference to the fact that the teacher in this particular classroom does not notice anything. Despite the fact that Zac and Erin together list a vast array of supposed distractions, ranging from learners eating in the classroom to others simply laughing at the surrounds, it seems apparent that their identified distractions all stem from the teacher's poor management of the classroom. Nevertheless, just like Tatum both Zac and Erin seem to anticipate the distractions and rather take pleasure in the distractions with Zac engaging in what he calls "a food ritual" and Erin simply laughing at what she calls "everything around me." A culture of engaging in, and indulging in, distractions thus emerges.

As mentioned previously, Gruenert and Whitaker (2017) have highlighted the fact that when a certain culture is prevalent in a school, in this case a culture of engaging in distractions, it is often difficult for individuals within the school to avoid following the culture of prevalence. Thus, to expect these learners to behave in a manner other than what has been described above, may be, to a degree, unrealistic. Certainly, in my view, Freire's (1996) assertion that individuals get trapped in a structure already in place, must be borne in mind at this juncture. Such is the case because the learners in my study have likely been submerged in a structure in which the aforementioned culture of indulging in distractions was already in place prior to their coming to the school. It is therefore, likely very difficult for them to simply avoid following the prevalent culture as would be supported by Gruenert and Whitaker's (2017) claims.

Although Khethiwe, Tatum, Zac and Erin identified distractions that physically exist within the school, Clint and Brittany make reference to a distraction that is physically situated outside the school grounds. Both Clint and Brittany view the presence and sight of industry

whilst at school as being a source of distraction. Britany views it as a source of distraction simply because it becomes a time consuming topic of discussion which tends to take precedence over school work. Thus, just like Khethiwe, Tatum, Zac and Erin the distraction identified by Britany requires some voluntary act by learners so as to, in a way, give it merit as a distraction. In this case, learners' choosing to talk about nearby industry, rather than focus on their school work, serves to form the voluntary act. Allen *et al* (2017) assert that seeking of distractions results in an uncondusive learning environment and this has dire consequences for learner academic performance. Thus Britany's account of distractions could very well promote learner poor performance, which in my view, only serves to disadvantage an already disadvantaged and marginalised group even further. Attempting to learn in such an environment can therefore be viewed as a social injustice.

Clint's reason for viewing the presence of industry as a distraction is somewhat more deeply seeded than Britany's; and the distraction in his case does not become a distraction through some voluntary act. This is because Clint mentally attaches a fear of blowing up whilst at school to the presence of industry. His constantly seeing it in the background while in a place that ought to be used for teaching and learning would presumably be very traumatic for him, and thus his viewing the presence of industry as a distraction is, in my view, very justifiable.

Simmons, Graham and Thomas (2015) who have written about what learners imagine an ideal schooling environment to encompass have suggested that when learners do not feel safe in their schooling environment they find it difficult to remain focused on learning. Again, if one is in a position in which it is difficult to remain focussed on learning it is reasonable to assume that one's academic performance will suffer. Thus, in my opinion, further evidence exists to suggest that an already marginalised group is disadvantaged further by having to learn in an environment where they are distracted by feelings of not being safe. Accordingly, Clint, in my opinion, is quite justified in viewing what he has claimed to be a distraction as an experience of social injustice.

Based on the analysis and discussion above, it thus seems apparent that despite distractions being present in one's physical surrounds, whether it be in the form of a noted rendezvous

point, which can be avoided or the general happenings in a particular classroom, which cannot be avoided, some of the learners mentioned above, in particular Khethiwe, Tatum, Zac and Erin each take some active steps to indulge in, and even enjoy, their distractions. In essence, the active steps which they each seem to have in common are that of indulgence in, and seeking of, their distractions. It thus appears that the culture of the school, i.e. a culture of perhaps seeking distractions, and indulging in them in the form of rendezvous points and silly laughing about trivialities takes precedence over a culture of learning, which is ultimately what schooling ought to be about. This marginalising of a culture of learning is most certainly a social injustice as these already marginalised learners find themselves trapped within a structure where it is taken as the norm to give a culture of learning the back seat. Hence, structural transformation, as proffered by Freire (1985) when addressing oppressive structures which make marginal beings for others within a structure, is indeed necessitated.

While Britany, on the one hand, does not mention anything to suggest an anticipation of a distraction on her part, as she describes having industry as a dominating topic of discussion as though it is anticipated and fuelled by other learners. Clint, on the other hand, anticipates his fear acting as a distraction, as he admits that he knows that he will think about blowing up constantly because of the school's close proximity to industry. Issues of Geography and its relation to social justice come into play as Clint's association of fear in a place that ought to be safe hints at an awareness, on his part, of the fact that something is amiss with the situating of a school so close to industry. It is here that the notion of critical consciousness, as suggested by Freire (1996) is of significance. This is because the promotion of critical consciousness so as to aid in altering the structure to which these learners are confined can be viewed as a way towards liberating these marginalised learners. Ideally, structural transformation will result in the elimination of their identified distractions, so that such distractions can no longer serve as a means by which learning is hindered, as distractions hindering learning can most certainly be viewed as a social injustice.



#### 5.4.4 Learners Experience Having to Learn in an Environment of Fear as a Social Injustice

Children in South Africa face a number of risks to their development. Such risks range from extreme poverty, the impact of HIV/AIDS to high levels of community violence and feelings of fear in their schooling environments (Boyes, Bowes, Cluver, Ward & Badcock 2014). Having to learn in an environment of fear can indeed hinder a child's development (Boyes *et al*, 2014). Ecological models of child and adolescent development suggest that development may be hindered at a number of levels, such as individual, family and cultural (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thus, to have a child's development hindered further at school, be it through having to learn in an environment of fear, could most certainly be construed as a social injustice, especially when dealing with children who come from somewhat disadvantaged backgrounds. Such is indeed the case in the instance of the learners who took part in my study. On this matter of having to learn in an environment of fear, the learners in my study had the following to say:

*Hearing the Bell or siren makes me think. It can be good when it signifies home-time or relief periods. We once had a relief period with a very strict teacher. I forgot my drawing board in the previous class. I was too scared to ask if I could get it, but I was also very afraid that someone may steal it. Fortunately in the next period my friend brought my board to me as she had seen it left in the classroom and took it for me. I was so relieved.- **Britany***

*This oneday the boys were doing something in the toilet, and a lady, a parent walked by the toilet and went in and started shouting and chucking everyone out. I was just laughing when I saw it. But I did feel uncomfortable, and even afraid to think that a lady would just go in and throw people out.- **Raymond***

Responding to Raymond:

*Well, there is a janitor, a male janitor who just goes into females toilets, when I first came to this school I was shocked. That is scary-**Khethiwe***



**Figure 5.20: The podium and quad area where assemblies are held**

*Looking at The podium and the quad, I can say it is not a pleasant sight for me. The podium is not my best friend because it's scary to go up in front of a lot of people. I used to have to go up when I was in the eco-club. Some people who go up are talented but over the edge, it could be okay except the other learners don't appreciate what you go through when you go up there, they usually laugh and ridicule you- Erin*

The spoken words of Britany, Raymond, Khethiwe and Erin suggest that learners' fears exist for multiple reasons. The reasons seem to range from fears concerning theft of one's property and intrusion in one's space when in a space as intimate as a toilet to fears of being laughed at or ridiculed. Britany's account of the day when she forgot her drawing board in a previous classroom and her associated fear of it being stolen seem to indicate that the learners in this school are being educated in a context in which one may be inclined to fear for the safety of one's property. Learning in such a context, I would argue, undoubtedly causes learners to view school as a space in which one ought to be afraid.

The constant risk of having one's property damaged or stolen, results not only in feelings of fear, but also feelings of victimisation. Often the effects of these feelings are expressed through acts of aggression and delinquency. Ultimately the academic performance of learners in such an environment tends to suffer (Boyes *et al*, 2014). The exposure to such happenings in school is clearly a social injustice as Boyes *et al* (2014) have contended that contemporarily children and adolescents have many challenges to face other than something as, to my mind, silly as having to worry about one's property being stolen or damaged.

Raymond and Khethiwe's fears centre on a more concerning issue, the issue being that of one's privacy in the toilets in the school. It seems rather alarming to me that parents may simply wander off the streets and into the toilets within a high school despite the motives being perhaps to restore order from disorder, as Raymond's account above suggests. In addition to parents of the opposite sex wandering into toilets, an occurrence which one may argue is likely not promoted by the school, what is even more alarming is that this school has employed the services of a male janitor to clean a female toilet in the school. This occurrence, given that the janitor is under the school's employ, cannot be argued to be outside the promotion of school management. Hence, learners' fears of intrusion whilst using school toilets is most justified in my opinion.

Gonsalves *et al* (2015) in an article concerning sexual violence in South Africa, have averred that the potential for sexual violence is a rather pressing issue in South Africa, and by simply improving safety around toilet facilities the likelihood of sexual assaults would decrease exponentially. The learners have not mentioned explicitly that they fear being sexually assaulted, however I feel it reasonable from their spoken words to deduce the possibility that such a fear exists. In addition, it should be noted that Gonsalves *et al* (2015) have expressed the belief that the costs of improved toilet facilities would be off-set by the decrease in costs of sexual assaults. Similarly, I would contend that the costs of improved security around school toilets would be off-set by a marked improvement in learner performance, should they have one less aspect to worry about other than school work. This improved performance would likely attract more parents and learners to the school, thus improving school revenue in general.

Erin's association of the podium with her fear of being laughed at or ridiculed is an issue which warrants some attention in my study. This is because in order to learn, grow and reach one's full potential, a space in which one is free enough to take chances and risks is required so as to enable growth through trial and error (Pillay & Govinden, 2007). However, if learners are being educated in a context in which being laughed at and ridiculed is commonplace it is likely that learners may develop at a rate lower than what would be the case if they were comfortable enough to just be free within themselves. Such contention can be supported by Darragh (2013) who suggests that when learners' confidence is hindered by

fears of being laughed at academic development of such learners tends to slow rapidly. Further, I feel it incumbent upon myself to highlight that Ramphele (2008) has argued that one cannot claim external liberation if one is not liberated within oneself. This is very significant in my view, as learners' fears of being laughed at and ridiculed can indeed result in far greater limitations on the general development of one than would ordinarily be expected. Certainly such experiences in an environment, supposedly of learning, can be considered a social injustice.

Fear of theft, invasion of space and very importantly, because of its implications expressed above, fear of being ridiculed are all very justifiable reasons to view school as a socially unjust space as learning in fear may limit the development of learners. Such argument can certainly be supported by the work of Boyes *et al* (2014) who, in their article focussing on child and adolescent development, have suggested that environments of fear, amongst other negatives limit child and adolescent development to a degree far beyond what is ordinarily conceived by many. Limitation of development in a space which ought to promote it is a very alarming and concerning point, and thus must be noted in my study. Accordingly, learners' considering of school to be a socially unjust space simply because one has to learn in fear is a justifiable consideration in my view; and it does in addition have far reaching implications as far as limitations on an already marginalised group of learners is concerned. Viewing school as socially unjust because of the existence of fear, in light of the discussion above, receives no objection, but rather support, from me.

#### **5.4.5 Learners Experience Difficulty in Divorcing Themselves from Material Realities and View this as a Social Injustice**

*When I grow up I want to be a taxi driver- Pemba Tamang, Nepal Earthquake survivor (2015)*

During April of 2015, while working on my thesis, I happened to turn on the BBC news in the middle of an interview with a 15-year old survivor of the Nepal earthquake of 2015. His words of simply wanting to be a taxi driver resonated in my mind as the similarity in what

many would deem low or limited expectations of oneself expressed between his words and the words of the learners whom I interviewed for my study was striking. I couldn't help but think to myself, after miraculously surviving for several days under a pile of rubble, is that it? Is that all you wish to do with your life, a life which is nothing short of a miracle, especially given the low survival rate which prevailed in Nepal subsequent to the disaster of the earthquake?

Nevertheless, I found myself in a very fortunate position of being able to draw a bridge across Tamang's words as well as the words of the learners in my study and Deleuze's (1994) assertion that imagination may be limited by one's material realities. Common amongst Tamang and the learners in my study is that they have both spent the bulk of their lives in a material reality that limits future possibilities of one attaining success, success in the sense of how it may be viewed by those unexposed to such a material reality. Hence, although to many, merely wanting to be a taxi driver seems rather mediocre, taking into account Tamang's material reality, to him it is success. Accordingly, the learners in my study, although having expressed what to them is success, at times one may be inclined to believe that such imaginings have indeed been limited by their material realities.

Deleuze (1994) contends that imagination is at times limited by experience and the material realities to which one is exposed. He argues that it is thus difficult to divorce oneself from material realities and so the perception of self is at times limited. Evidenced in the words of the learners in my study is the suggestion that they too find it, at times, difficult to divorce their self-perceptions from their everyday material realities. These learners accordingly view their school as being a socially unjust space because it is a space in which this difficulty is often realised.

*What's happening around me really does influence the way I perform. For instance, if there is an atmosphere of people studying, like during exams I will study really well. However, when everyone around me is having fun, then I just want to join in and go all out. So, I need to find a balance in order to be academically successful, or at least I need to avoid being around people who are not interested in working- **Britany***

*When I got to grade 10 I knew I was going to do well, but now I'm just not on track with what I was supposed to do because friends influence me, they come and talk about things that are not work related, then I don't focus.-Daina*

*When I was in Gr 8 on parent's evening one teacher actually told my mother that she should get me out of this school because this school will just change my mindset to one of not caring and doing badly at school- Erin.*

*I have been told that I have a lot of potential. But honestly, I don't see it because there's nobody I know who has really made it. Plus, now as I get to the higher grades I find there are lots of temptations that distract me.-Lawrence*

*My aunt will talk about the future and what I could be, but she admits that there's still a lot that needs to be done to get from here, where I am now, to a really good job and good place in my life. The journey from here puts me off. I find it to be very off-putting.- Khethiwe*

Britany, Lawrence and Daina have made reference to the fact that their immediate surrounds, in particular the people within their surrounds and their general behaviour has a tendency to distract them from engaging in their academic work. They view these distractions caused by other people as a source of inhibitions as far as focusing on, and doing well in, school work is concerned. Britany claims that when everyone around her is having fun, she feels encouraged to simply join in, rather than do her school work. Daina claims that she fails to focus when friends talk to her about matters unrelated to school work, whereas Lawrence explains that he finds there to be more temptations at the higher grades of schooling that act as distractions than what he experienced at the lower grades. However, Lawrence does not detail exactly what temptations he has encountered.

Rosvall, Hjelmer and Lappalainen (2017) whose research has focussed on labelling have asserted that surrounds play a role in labelling learners, be it labels assigned by teachers, or by learners themselves. Considering Rosvall *et al's* (2017) assertion alongside Deleuze's (1994) claim that one learns through repetition of what appears to one as a concrete material reality, I feel it safe to contend that the learners in my study are demonstrating having learned, through their surrounds to fit within a certain label through repetition of that labelling in what they conceive as a concrete reality. In this instance the labelling could be one that may be associated with going along with distractions initiated by others. Relying on Gruenert and Whitaker's (2017) work concerning school cultures, I feel that their assertion

that learners tend to adopt the prevalent culture within a school so as to not cause waves, may be of relevance here. This is because it certainly seems to me that the extracts above are suggestive of learners adopting a school or classroom culture which promotes labelling themselves in such a way that they are the type of learners who go along with distractions. The learners could, likely be inclined to accept this labelling readily because they lack experiencing a material reality different from one that promotes such labelling and practices. Deleuze's (1994) argument that it is difficult to divorce oneself from a material reality to which one has been constantly exposed, once again seems to be relevant, as the learners in my study seem to be experiencing that same difficulty. Difficulty in divorcing one's self-perception from material reality can thus be viewed as a social injustice.

Khethiwe and Erin, although also focusing on their surrounds, rather than linking their inhibitions as far as being able to focus on schooling is concerned directly to people, they draw a link between inhibitions and circumstance. Khethiwe talks about the long journey between where she is now and where she would like to be. She views the idea of having to embark on this lengthy journey as what discourages her, and so prevents her from focusing. Erin speaks about the school itself changing her mind-set to one of not caring, which would ultimately result in her doing badly. Based on Erin's words, and focusing particularly on the fact that no reference is made to any specific people, one can deduce that it may very well be the practices within the school and the general running of the school which may change her mindset, rather than specific people themselves.

From the above, it appears that both Khethiwe and Erin hint at the fact that in addition to one's ability to focus being inhibited by various peoples' distractions, one's ability to focus can, and does too, get inhibited by general circumstances. Falout, Elwood and Hood (2009) who have written about motivating factors influencing both learner and staff performance expostulated that many circumstances within schools can operate as demotivating factors which thwart learner performance. Some of the circumstances include teaching styles, inadequate facilities and a general lack of motivation (Falout *et al*, 2009). It seems likely to me that a general lack of motivation in the school is one of the circumstances which retard Erin and Khethiwe's abilities to remain focused, admittedly there are likely several other sets of circumstances.

For the purposes of my study I will focus only on the general lack of motivation in the school as this circumstance can be linked directly to the work of Deleuze (1994), which ultimately frames my study. Deleuze's (1994) suggestion that imagination may be useful in the dislodging of embedded meanings is of relevance here as I feel inclined to argue that both Erin and Khethiwe may be able to overcome the circumstance of a general lack of motivation by simply imagining a set of circumstances that may motivate them to remain focussed on their school work. Such a practice will indeed increase the likelihood of attaining academic success. Nevertheless, the difficulty which they experience in divorcing themselves from their material reality which lacks motivation can, in my view, be deemed a social injustice.

Evident from the quoted words, presentation and analysis above is the fact that each of the mentioned learners do, to some extent, just like Pemba Tamang, experience difficulty in divorcing themselves from their material realities. Their material realities are, as evidenced above, riddled with inhibitions in respect of one's ability to simply focus on school work so as to succeed academically, or at least see this as a possibility. Some of the learners mentioned above, experience distractions evoked by other learners, which ultimately inhibits their ability to focus, thus also making it difficult for them to see academic success as a possibility. While others experience inhibitions through general circumstances such as the viewing of the idea of a lengthy journey from where one is to where one would like to be as being "off-putting." Implicit in this, could be that the viewing of oneself as ever reaching the end goal is something seemingly far-fetched from one's material reality. In a true Deleuzian style I would even suggest that their imaginative attitudes appear to be somewhat realistic in nature, which ultimately runs the risk of limiting one's imagination which in turn limits one's prospects of attaining success to exist within the confines of one's material reality (Deleuze, 1994). Material realities that inhibit one's ability to focus on school work and so see the possibility of succeeding can most certainly be viewed as a social injustice.

To elaborate further on this issue of material realities, I am inclined to contend that the realities of Lawrence and Khethiwe, in particular, go beyond mere distractions. Their realities do indeed, I would argue, enter the realm where one experiences limitations in respect of divorcing self-perception from influences of material reality as a result of the context in which one finds oneself. Lawrence, on the one hand, finds it difficult to believe



that he can indeed be successful because he does not know of anyone else who came from his environment and yet succeeded at life. Whereas Khethiwe, on the other hand, views the somewhat perceived long journey between where she is now, and being successful, as a factor which may, prevent her from achieving success. It seems apparent that the material realities of Khethiwe at present make it, to a degree, easier for her to realise the vast distance between her current position and future position. She, although not only focusing on distractions, is certainly not exempt from being limited by her material realities.

The realities described above seem to exist within a schooling structure which is already in place, and has been for many years. These structures foster the material realities which limit learners' perceptions of self in that, as expressed above, they are absent of success stories, have teachers telling parents to take learners out of the school if they want them to succeed, yet remain riddled with a culture of everyone having fun. In accordance with the work of Freire (1996) I would be quite justified in asserting that the schooling structures which seem to foster these material realities expressed by the learners above serve only to perpetuate the marginalisation of an already oppressed group, as academic success, according to Bloch (2009) remains but one of very few means by which the disadvantaged in society may overcome the massive building blocks of a second economy which keep the disadvantaged in place.

Learners' difficulties in divorcing self-perceptions from material realities is certainly as good a reason as any, in my opinion, to view school as a socially unjust space. Such is the case given that it is this very space, a schooling space, which appears to foster this material reality which gives rise to learners experiencing difficulty in divorcing themselves from it. Perhaps transformation of this limiting space is indeed necessitated if these marginalised beings are to be liberated (Freire, 1996). However, this liberation may only be possible if this schooling space is transformed into one in which imagination is not limited, and so imagination can indeed act as a vehicle for liberation moving one away from oppressive material realities towards transcendence of such realities aided by the eventual attainment of academic success.

## 5.5 Theme 3: School Spaces That Represent Social Injustices

### 5.5.1 Spaces Depicting a sad Present Represent Social Injustices



Figure 5.21: Pictures of members of parliament found in the reception area

*Pictures of the president and other ministers hang up in our reception. Those pictures make no difference to my experience of schooling. Those pictures do remind me of our country's sad past. But it also reminds me of our sad present, our president and how hopeless he is. There is no change in our school no matter what happens in government. That leaves me very worried about the future, if we even have one-**Erin***

*I don't even like seeing those pictures in the reception, it annoys me and makes me angry because personally I don't like Jacob Zuma because of all the corruption, and he does nothing for the people, that's why we, ordinary people still battle the way we do. We can talk about success, but in this place, South Africa, which is run so poorly, how will we ever achieve it? Yes, we can only achieve success if those of us who have been so disadvantaged are provided with more assistance than those who are already on top. When I say "on top" I mean those who already have a good life, a great life-**Tatum***

*That space should rather be used to honour the hard work of the students. Once, before those pictures were there I drew a good picture in Arts and Culture and the teacher put it up there for a few weeks. I think that wall space is better used for stuff like that instead of a president who robs us of our futures with the way he's running this country- **Nicole***

Spaces within the school remind the learners in my study of, as Erin put it, “our sad present.” The “present” to which the learners refer, in the extracts above, hinge on political aspects. A simple, and seemingly innocent few pictures displayed in the reception area of the school

evoked immense anger and resentment regarding the political happenings in contemporary South Africa. It would appear that learners too, and in particular marginalised learners are not immune to the influences of contemporary politics on schooling.

Political influences in South Africa have resulted in an alarming growth rate of the economic gap between the marginalised and the elite over the last two decades (Hofmeyr & Nyoka, 2013). This trend has certainly filtered into, and been reflected in South African schools as is evidenced in the existence of two schooling systems as described by Bloch (2009) in my literature review. The learners in my study are, in my contention, thus rather justified in feeling the influences of contemporary politics on their schooling experiences.

Erin associates the picture of Jacob Zuma with hopelessness and a lack of change. These associations, she admits, leave her worried about her future. Tatum, similarly to Erin, associates the picture with corruption and the continuation of economic strife for who she calls “ordinary people.” However, Tatum takes matters a step further by linking her associations with the unlikelihood of achieving success in the present political climate of South Africa. Nicole, while also making reference to the bleakness of one’s future, which echoes the words of Erin, argues that the space in the school housing the pictures of the president and his ministers would be better used as a space which honours the hard work and efforts of learners within the school.

Nielsen *et al* (2010) have criticised educational contexts as oftentimes being so limited in both practice and experience that learners are left with little possibility of imagining brighter futures. In my opinion, the school’s practice of placing these pictures of politicians in so prominent a position is likely due to a limited experience in which such practice has been the norm for several years. It thus becomes apparent that the school’s limited practices which are exacerbated by limited experience only seem to be representative of social injustices within the school, to the learners in my study. This representation undoubtedly limits learners’ imaginings of future success because upon immediate entry of the school one is reminded of the perceived bleakness of one’s future in the current political conditions of the country.

Across South Africa many a government school chooses to display pictures of politicians in their reception area, as if it has been ordered by some general decree. They do this, rather than use the space to honour people within the school itself; like learners who have worked particularly hard and achieved some sort of success, despite how minor it may be. Using spaces in a school to honour learners and staff would likely motivate others within the school to make a difference or, in the case of learners, strive harder for academic success (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). However, this is clearly not the case, as expressed by the learners' words above. I am thus inclined to contend that should the space be used to honour learners who have made extra efforts to achieve success, naturally motivation to strive for success would occur. Accordingly, then, learners may find it easier to begin to imagine experiencing success rather than having their abilities to imagine success hampered by, what I would be bold enough to call, the misuse of school space. It is indeed a misuse of space, as using the space in the manner described above, in no way promotes any motivation in respect of improved academic performance. If anything an annoyance with the gesture is evident in the words of Tatum, Nicole and Erin in the extracts above.

Apart from annoyance with the gesture itself, Tatum highlights a need for greater support for those who are already disadvantaged and simply trying to make a success of their lives. Nicole's words make clear the fact that she feels as though those in power are guilty of robbing her and presumably others like her, of their futures. At this juncture I feel it incumbent upon myself to remind the reader that the learners whom I interviewed come from a community which falls clearly within Young's (2000) understanding of marginalised beings, that is to say, subordinate beings who have been pushed to the outskirts by the dominants in society. The dominants in this case could very well be politicians, people in power and anyone who has an economic advantage over these learners where such advantage is sustained by the current practices and general structures surrounding schooling for these learners.

These marginalized beings, according to Young (2000) are then forced to face material deprivation while others have plenty when in fact there is plenty to go around. But, sadly an inequitable distribution of power and resources tends to prevail in South Africa as long as formal equality is practiced (Hofmeyr & Nyoka, 2013). Thus, Nicole's reference to "us"

likely refers to the marginalized whom she feels are robbed of their futures by those in power, and I would suggest this robbing happens through the treating of all the same (formal equality), rather than providing additional support for those who require it. Accordingly, although clearly needed, substantive equality, as argued for by Gynther (2009) is lacking in the daily school lives of the learners whom I interviewed. Sadly, such realisations are evoked by the mere displaying of politicians' pictures in the reception area, an area which likely greets the learners in my study on a daily basis. Thus, one can only assume that a very negative tone and general atmosphere of learning is likely set from the outset of each day for these learners. Understandably then, the reception area represents a space of social injustices for the learners in my study. The association of this space with hopelessness, as expressed by Erin, would also suggest that it may be difficult for one to imagine a brighter future when faced with such a space. Accordingly, the imagining of success is somewhat limited.

### **5.5.2 Spaces That Promote an Unequal Distribution of Power Represent Social Injustice**

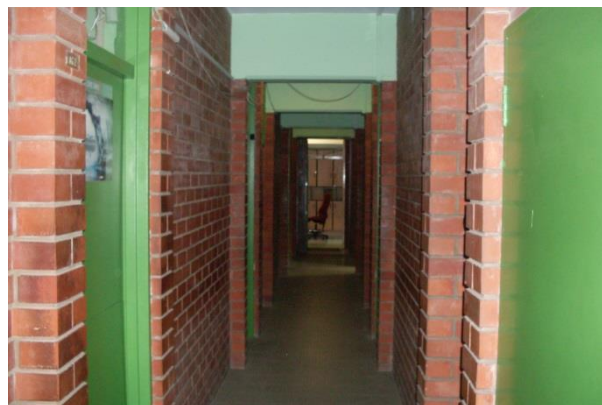
Power was alluded to in the previous sub-theme. In this sub-theme further elaboration takes place with particular reference to the distribution of power. The unequal distribution of power and how this may relate to learners' viewing certain spaces as representing social injustice will be elaborated upon. The propagation of social injustice through unequal distributions of power has been written about rather extensively by authors such as Freire (1996) and Young (2000). However, more recently, and with specific reference to the South African context, Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) have made the assertion that an unequal distribution of power and resources only serves to perpetuate social inequality which spans several generations.

*I performed once at the podium, the podium does equal fame which made me feel powerful-*

***Khethiwe***

*The podium does equal power as well because even if people don't want to listen they kind of have to when you're up there. That's why they listen when the principal is up there, it gives him some power.-Tatum*

Khethiwe and Tatum both associate the school's podium from where assemblies are held with the idea of power. Khethiwe links power to fame whereas Tatum links power to authority. Nevertheless, in both instances the underlying point is clear, whoever is at the podium will have the ear of the rest of the school. To me it is as though the physical space described by both Khethiwe and Tatum serves as a platform from which one can be heard. This is significant in my study as an essential principle in the promotion of social justice, and closely aligned with the critical theory paradigm, is that a voice must be given to the oppressed in order to aid their liberation (Young, 2000). Hence, if such a physical space can give one a voice and the accompanying power, exactly who has access to such a space, and how they come to have this access, becomes a topic of significance. Accordingly, then if access to such a space is not equally shared, the space itself, I would argue, can serve to represent social injustice.



**Figure 5.22: Corridor leading to the principal's office**

*I got sent to the office once for something that I didn't do, I wasn't here and a girl was spreading rumours about me doing stuff that I didn't do. It was my first time getting sent there. Just being at the office was intimidating because it seems so serious and just makes you think "trouble, I'm in trouble" The deputy principal knows my family so I felt very weird because he was like, "must I come and tell your mother what you're doing here"- Erin*

*In Gr 8 I brought a cracker to school, I got ratted out and was sent to the office with a bunch of other boys who also brought crackers. I was standing outside the principal's office and just being there made me scared. I was afraid and nervous, I was shaking. Just being there is terrifying- Louis*

*Passage going down to the office, it looks very scary to me. It's dark and dingy. The first time I got sent there I just froze, I felt so small and powerless in that space- Toby*

Erin, Louis and Toby describe instances in which they had to go to the principal's or deputy principal's offices. To address the question I raised earlier concerning who has access to spaces of power, it would seem as though management in the school has easy access to spaces of power. In this case management has access to the office area. This space is so closely associated with power that Erin, Louis and Toby each make reference to some degree of trepidation when having to be in that space. Such an allocation of a power related space is, however, rather typical of contemporary South African schools, and indeed many schools throughout the world (Bayat *et al*, 2014). But, what is significant here is that with that power, based on the words of the participants above, comes the ability to determine who gets into trouble and who does not. Thus, learners are rather justified, in my opinion, in experiencing trepidation when being in such a space. Should those with access to this space abuse their power, perhaps in the form of learner favouritism, as has been alluded to earlier, I am inclined to contend that such a space would indeed represent social injustice.



**Figure 5.23: Air-conditioning units in spaces deemed important**

*Only selected places have aircons, like some of the drawing rooms. So priority is given to the office and to some of the technical classes because this school places greater emphasis on technical subjects, assuming that because we're from this area we will only want to do trades. They don't even put aircons on the maths classes.-Toby*

*Also, those classes, the technical ones get funding from industry, that's why they get the aircons. But I don't know why other less technical classes don't get funding as if it's pointless placing emphasis on those classes with people like us-Tatum*

Even the allocation of air-conditioning units has associations with power in the school. Toby claims that the school places a greater emphasis on technical subjects and so they invest a greater interest in the classrooms that cater for such subjects. This is done with the belief that most people from the area which this school serves will go into trades and therefore follow less academic paths in life (Sparks, 2006). Tatum agrees with Toby, but brings a new dimension to the argument, being that of funding. She argues that the surrounding industry provides funding to the technical classes in the school, and as such they enjoy better facilities. This would undoubtedly make the learning experience in such classes far more pleasant than the experience in a less resourced or facilitated classroom.

These allocations of resources, to my mind, resonate quite resoundingly with Hofmeyr and Nyoka's (2013) assertion that an unequal distribution of resources only serves to perpetuate and exacerbate inequality and the oppression of the disempowered. Thus, I would argue, forcing the learners, who are already marginalised to limit any future views of themselves to careers only within trade is indeed a social injustice and certainly does act to place gross limitations on these learners' imaginings of themselves in the future. The spaces described above, through the mere allocation of air-conditioning units do, in my opinion represent social injustices. The learners in my study are therefore justified in viewing these spaces in such a manner.

What does remain ironic to me is that within the school, power is given to these technical subjects and the people who take them. This is done by providing more funding and greater resources to these subjects and classrooms. But outside of the school, in society in general, through encouraging these learners to follow paths associated with trades, their potentials for attaining greater success in life are somewhat limited (Sparks, 2006). This unequal distribution of power within the school, aided by the allocation of better spaces for those learners who are, to a degree, in power in the school, is the same allocation of power which takes power away from these learners outside of the school. Thus, in my opinion, nothing good can come from the unequal distribution of power, as expressed above, and it therefore most certainly does constitute a social injustice.



In addition to the above, the spaces in which this unequal distribution of power is reflected, do indeed represent spaces of social injustice. Undoubtedly, repeated exposure to such a space can serve to limit one's imagination. Such contention is in accordance with Deleuze's (1994) claim that repeated exposure to material realities limit one's ability to imagine freely beyond such realities. The representation of social injustices by spaces in the school, and its influence and limitation on learners' imaginations, thus, in my view, becomes apparent.

## **5.6 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter, themes one through three were presented. These themes addressed my first two research questions which focused on learners' experiences of social injustices as well as the question of how spaces of social injustice may influence learners' imaginations. In the next chapter, themes four and five of my data analysis will be presented. Themes four and five respond to my second two research questions being those of how imaginings of success influence learner performance as well as why have these imaginings influenced performance in the way in which they have.

## Chapter Six

### Responses to Social Injustices and Imaginings of Success

#### 6.1 Introduction

In my previous chapter, themes one through three addressed my first two research questions which focused on learners' experiences of social injustices as well as the question of how spaces of social injustice may influence learners' imaginations. In this chapter, themes four and five of my data analysis are presented. I have grouped these two themes together as they both, to some degree respond to my second two research questions being those of how imaginings of success influence learner performance as well as why might these imaginings influence performance in the way in which they have.

#### 6.2 Theme 4: Learners' Responses to Social Injustices

##### 6.2.1 Rebelling as a Response to Social Injustices and a Possible Influence on Imagination



Figure 6.1: The principal's office door

*I brought a stink bomb to school, and it went off by mistake. My friend and I went to the office, we sat there the whole day because the principal was busy. Then when he came he was still busy so he just said we must go and pick up papers around the school and bring the bins to show him what we've done.- Zac*

*I used to be in drum-majorettes, and the stick accidentally hit my glasses so the lens was loose. Then oneday I was walking my friend home and these two other girls from the school came up to me and slapped me and the loose lens fell out. The next day I caught those girls and slapped them too and swore them. But I didn't know my mother was coming to school to talk to the principal about what happened to me, because I told her when those girls attacked me. So when I got called down to the office, I was so afraid that they were going to tell that I hit them and swore them too. Luckily those girls didn't tell about that, they just said "oh, they're sorry" so fortunately my mother and the principal didn't find out what I did. But after that incident the principal remembers me.-Erin*

Acts of rebellion appear commonplace amongst the learners in this particular school. It is my contention that isolated and collective incidents are very often direct responses to the prevalence of social injustices in and around the school. Welsh (2014), who writes about the teaching of resistance to youths, has suggested that acts of rebellion on the part of youths should not always be discouraged as rebelling has historically been linked with resistance to oppression. For instance, from the extracts above, Erin physically assaulted and cursed two other learners mainly because, in her view, an injustice had been inflicted on her by those two learners just one day previously. Although I am in no way condoning physical assaults, Erin's act serves to demonstrate Welsh's (2014) suggestion that rebelling can be linked to resisting oppression. Erin did, however, fear that there may have been consequences for her actions. However, there were none.

Very similar to Erin's account, Zac recalled an incident with a stink bomb in which the consequences for his having it present, and the, albeit inadvertent letting it off, were very minimal. In 2004, Brown, who wrote about weaving transformation in schools, asserted that consequences attached to actions of youth, despite how well-meaning their motives behind the actions may be, are in fact necessary as they help set boundaries and teach young people about themselves. This, Brown (2004) argued promotes the likelihood of positive engagements with society. Thus, I am inclined to contend that both Erin and Zac ought to have faced more severe consequences for their actions.

It does however, remain my assertion that Zac's mere act of bringing the stink bomb to school can likely be associated with general rebellion for the circumstances which remain prevalent in and around the school. The circumstances to which I refer are circumstances of learners being bored with curricula and circumstances of experiencing social injustices within the school, as evidenced in the themes above. Thus, I am inclined to fall back on Welsh's (2014) claim that rebellion may be required when resisting instances of oppression. The issue of boredom was also evident in the words of Lawrence which were shared in a previous theme where he had the following to say:

*I've played sick before and I'll likely play sick again. Especially on those kind of days where there is no point in being at school because teachers are just doing revision work. It becomes very boring and most people don't pay attention anyway. I can rather stay at home and do something more constructive, like eat or something-**Lawrence***

I thus find no reason to believe that Zac took the time to bring the stink bomb to school with absolutely no intention of using it at some stage within the school itself. Given the prevalence of social injustices in the school, as evidenced in much of my prior discussions, analyses and presentations it remains very likely, in my opinion, that learners do indeed rebel as a response to the occurrences of social injustices. Rebelling in general, may, in my opinion, encourage learners to begin to rebel in their imaginings to such a degree that they are able to break the constraints that their material realities to which Deleuze (1994) very often refers seems to have on their imaginations. It is my contention that rebelling in this fashion would enable learners to transcend the very circumstances which they find to be socially unjust.

## 6.2.2 Writing off Attempts as a Waste of Time is a Response to Social Injustices Which Influences Imagination

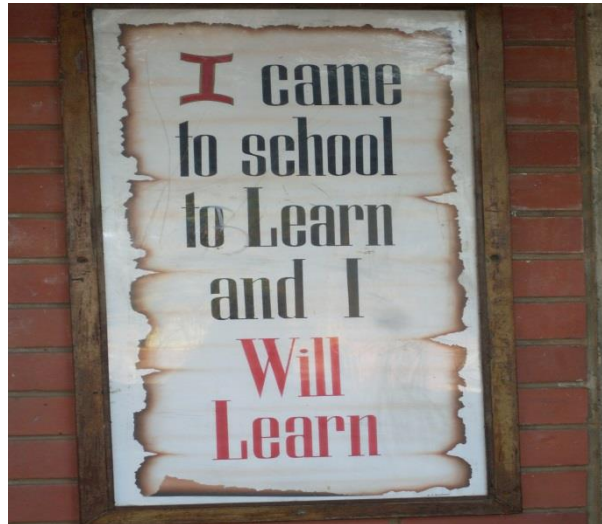


Figure 6.2: Signage displayed around the school

*Those Engen classes, advertised on the poster, are boring and a waste of time, you don't really learn anything much. So even that is a waste of time, even advertising it is a waste of time.- Nicole*

*Sign stating: no guns, no alcohol, no drugs etc, it's a waste of time because people bring all this into the school anyway. If they are going to have the signs up they might as well have security to enforce these rules. That will make an immediate change to the way things are- Lawrence*

*The poster was a waste of time because the kids in the school will never stop smoking. Rules mean nothing to them. The posters mean nothing to them. So I feel annoyed looking at it, and any poster. -Khetiwe*

Attempts geared towards the betterment of learners' academic advancements can generally be conceived as being positive. However, evidenced in the extracts above is the fact that many a learner in this school displayed a tendency to simply write off these attempts as a waste of time. It is my belief that the learners in my study have been so regularly exposed to instances of social injustices that attempts which, on the face of it, make little if any immediate difference to their present situations, can most justifiably be viewed as a waste of time. Thacker (2011) who writes about struggles to get femininity valued in a patriarchal society

argues that when change happens slowly the oppressed feel hopeless and so view all attempts as a waste of time.

It is apparent that learners in my study, understandably, want immediate results from attempts at promoting academic success. Their wanting immediate results is quite clearly suggested in the words of Lawrence, above, where he claims that having security guards present to enforce rules would make an immediate change to his current situation. Given the slow rate at which change may be happening in the lives of these learners, it is not surprising then, that they view attempts to improve academic performance in their current circumstances as a mere waste of time. Viewing attempts in this manner may make it difficult for the learners to begin to imagine achieving academic success as Vinz (1997) has postulated that in order to adequately free the mind to imagine new possibilities firstly, embedded meanings need to be dislodged.

Given that there are no people physically in place to enforce rules that are expressed through signage it is not surprising that Khethiwe shares a similar frustration to Lawrence when she speaks about a “No-Smoking” poster being a waste of time. She goes on to assert that rules mean nothing to the learners in the school, thus her viewing attempts put forward through signage as a waste of time seems quite reasonable. Brown (2004) has asserted that learners prefer to be in a position to take some sort of action against perceived injustices. Thus, merely placing signs around the school would, in my opinion, be far too passive a response to injustices for the learners in my study.

Nicole brings a new dimension to attempts being a waste of time as she shifts away from signage and the viewing of it as a waste of time in the context of this school towards a focus on extra lessons offered by Engen, which she views as a waste of time. Her justification for the viewing of these lessons as a waste of time is that apart from them being boring; she feels that ultimately one does not learn very much. Having to attend lessons which likely last from anything ranging between 45 minutes to a few hours, and having these same lessons teach one very little, does in my view, waste time. Time in the life of learners is indeed very precious as this supposed “wasted time” could rather be used to engage in individual study

which may enhance the likelihood of these learners achieving academic success. Such contention can be supported by Yair (2000) in his article concerning the productive use of time in schools. It is Yair's (2000) assertion that where little engagement of learners takes place, the mere allocation of time is pointless as it does little in improving academic performance and even less as far as achieving greater social equality in education is concerned. I am thus inclined to argue that Nicole's viewing of these lessons as a waste of time is justified.

From what has been discussed above, it does indeed seem apparent to me that the creation of signage which is largely ignored and therefore makes very little difference in the lives of these learners is a waste of time in their realities. In addition to that, additional lessons which do not result in much learning, as argued by Nicole, and supported by Yair (2000) is also a waste of time. The attempts, described above, which are generally conceived as positive, but yield little if any result in transforming the daily experiences of the learners in my study, can undoubtedly be written off as a waste of time. Writing them off rather than having learners waste more time by trying to embrace them seems to be practiced as a direct response to the prevailing instances of social injustices in and around the schooling environment to which these learners remain heavily exposed.

The writing off of attempts at improving the learning environment as a waste of time may adversely influence imaginings of success. This is because Ricoeur (1978), one of the earlier authorities on imagination has claimed that imagination cannot be separated from one's senses. Observing the writing off of attempts to improve the learning environment certainly does rely on the use of senses. Thus, having one's senses exposed to attempts being written off would possibly adversely influence imagination to the degree that one only imagines possibilities with attempts at improvement being a waste of time. I am inclined, at this juncture to argue that it would undoubtedly be difficult for one to then go on to imagine the attainment of academic success in the midst of attempts at improving the learning environment simply being dismissed as a waste of time.

### 6.2.3 Identifying Causes of Poor Performance is a Response to Social Injustices and Influences Imagination

*Now that I am a senior I try to work harder and am doing better than I did before, but I feel I could do even better, perhaps if I was in a better resourced school, or a better performing school like the private schools-**Khethiwe***

*In my opinion I don't perform as well as I would like to because my priorities are not what they should be right now. I need to have fun with my friends but I know it gets in the way of my schooling success.-**Britany***

*At the moment my performance is not where I would like it to be and honestly, I am not happy with the amount of effort that I put in but it's difficult because I get distracted with life, both of my parents are late and sometimes that plays on my mind-**Toby***

*I don't perform the way I would like to, I know I need to put in more study time, but I am distracted very easily. I get distracted by small things like what's on TV now or other people talking about stuff etc. It's everything that happens around me that is the cause of my poor performance. If we know where the cause is we can take care of it - **Lawrence***

Based on the extracts above, the learners in my study seem to acknowledge that their academic performance is not as grand as they would desire. They tend to attribute their poor performance to socio-economic issues, context and in particular, distractions within their contexts. Learners who are victims of social inequalities in education are the ones faced with nonconductive contexts of learning within schools (Yair, 2000). Unsurprisingly, the learners in my study identified context as a contributing factor to their poor performance.

Britany, Toby and Lawrence all allude to issues of effort as well as the focusing of one's attention on one's own work. In essence, they locate the cause of their poor performance within themselves, thus relating their poor performance directly to changes which they can execute within themselves concerning their prioritising of work, as Britany indicates. Toby and Lawrence each respectively suggest effort and time allocation as causes of their poor performance. A gap between allocated time and productive time is instructionally created argues Yair (2000) through the hegemonic nature of teaching which tends to favour learners who arrive in a schooling environment already equipped to learn independently. Considering



the demographics of the learners in my study and relating Yair's (2000) assertion to a claim made by Salo (2005) that "coloured" and "African" learners have a poorer perception of the importance of schooling ingrained in them by their early cultural experiences; I cannot help but wonder if allocating more time and putting in greater effort will come easily to the learners in my study.

In addition, given that the learners in my study are likely on the receiving end of the hegemonic nature of teaching, identified by Yair (2000), I am further inclined to suggest that even with their putting in more time and effort towards their schooling, their academic performance may still reflect little if any improvement. The impact this would have on their imaginings of success would probably be a negative one as Deleuze (1994) has suggested that repetition reinforces constraints on imagination. In addition, Nielsen *et al* (2010) have argued that reinforcing what learners already know about their performance from experience reduces the likelihood of such learners being able to plot out a path, through imagination, to achieve future success.

Nevertheless, Khethiwe shifts the blame for her poor academic performance from an internal source, as suggested by the other learners, towards a more external source, being that of school resources. Khethiwe claims that she may have been able to perform better had she been in a better resourced school. By her own admission, she identifies private schools as being potentially better resourced schools. Her claims are certainly in line with Bloch's (2009) contention that two school worlds exist, being one for the wealthy and one for the poor.

According to Bloch (2009) the better resourced schools serve the wealthy and these schools tend to produce learners who are better equipped to access tertiary education and so stand a far greater chance than their poorer counterparts of attaining economic success in later life. The learners in my study belong to the so called poorer counterparts and are therefore stuck in what Bloch (2009) calls "the second schooling system" which serves the less wealthy. These circumstances present a grim reality facing the learners in my study as they stand a lesser chance of attaining success in later life. Such a reality would, in my opinion, and

taking into account Deleuze's (1994) arguments concerning realistic imaginations, only serve to discourage imagination that goes beyond the confines of this second schooling system which Bloch (2009) has so eloquently identified.

Whether the cause for learner poor performance exists in an external or internal source remains somewhat irrelevant in my study. This is because the source of their poor performance does not seem to detract from the fact that the learners in my study find it imperative to identify a source of their poor performance. They do this in the context of social injustices, so as to respond to the prevailing social injustices in their learning contexts. Social injustices, based on the data presented above, remain prevalent in their learning context. It is apparent that these learners believe that identifying the source may help them improve their performance, as is evidenced in their words above.

Nevertheless, I remain fairly confident that despite the efforts of the learners in my study, their imaginations of success will indeed remain limited by their material realities. In the case of the learners in my study, their realities are riddled with social injustices which they face on a regular basis. This assertion corresponds with Deleuze's (1994) calls for realistic imaginative attitudes as well as accuracy in imagination. However, this is not to suggest that the possibility of using imagination as a vehicle for liberation must be excluded completely. This is because, despite their realities, learners remain free to imagine, and the more they imagine the longer they sit at the border of what is known from experience and what could be, and Deleuze (1994) has argued that eventually the two will merge.

#### **6.2.4 Rejecting Policy as a Response to Injustices**

*Having extra classes is a good idea but what I don't like is that the work they do there is often not the same as where you are in the syllabus in class so it gets very confusing. To me it's like there is a relation but it's not there when you need it- zac*

*I've never been to extra classes before, I do think I should go to help me improve, but then I am uncertain about going because I have heard that those people just take your money and waste your time. I could rather use that time to study on my own- **Khethiwe***

*I think that the extra classes do help me, but the problem is that it's too tiring because going to those classes means that everyday of the week you need to wake up early. And then on the weekend they last for the whole day, so after all that you are out of energy. You could rather use that energy to study on your own-**Britany***

*Yeah, I joined the extra classes because my parents insisted I do. I had no idea it was going to be so tiring that I can't help but wonder if I wouldn't do better without them as they are using up my energy. Energy which I could rather use on my school work-**Toby***

While the idea of extra lessons outside of ordinary school time may seem attractive, and indeed conducive to academic success; based on the extracts above, one cannot help but wonder if the attractiveness of the idea of extra lessons as seen on paper, is in fact as attractive in practice. Morrow (2007) who has written about teachers' work has asserted that in education what exists on paper and what happens in practice are often rather different. Also, concerns surrounding a "disconnect" between content covered in school and content covered at these extra lessons are raised by Zac. He asserts that this disconnect results in much confusion.

In my opinion, Zac is justified in his assertion because covering content that has little or no relation to other learned content results in isolated learning, as argued by Keller and Suzuki (2004) which is a sort of learning that is very baseless in that new knowledge simply hangs in mid-air. If learners were to become frustrated with such learning, having seen no relevance to their current circumstances, I would not find that to be too far reaching a consequence as learning content that cannot be applied and thus lacks relevance does indeed unnecessarily use learners' energy which could be better spent as argued by Toby.

The unnecessary expenditure of energy, as highlighted by Toby's words above is an issue that appears most common in the words of both Khethiwe and Britany. Khethiwe expresses the fear that not only will extra lessons be a waste of money for her, but they may also be a waste of time, time which she feels could be better spent studying on her own. Britany

highlights the fact that attendance at extra lessons means that one is required to resign oneself to an early rise on each and every day of the week. This, Britany argues drains one of one's energy, in her case energy which she feels can be put to better use engaging in individual study. Accordingly, this issue of the unnecessary expenditure of one's energy seems most prominent in her words too. Yair (2000) has argued that wasting energy is an example of tendencies which promote social reproduction in education where the disadvantaged remain in a dependent state.

A connection between Zac's concern of isolated learning and Khethiwe, Toby and Britany's concern of unnecessary expenditure of time and energy cannot be denied. Isolated learning and expenditure of time and energy thus appear intertwined as the learners interviewed above, seem to suggest that extra lessons often result in expenditure of valuable time and effort on what can be deemed unnecessary learning. Yair (2000) has made quite clear that many educational practices promote reproduction of social inequalities. He focuses specifically on the hegemonic nature of schooling in that as far as productive use of time and energy is concerned it favours learners who are able and willing to work independently. As I have explained above Salo (2005) as well as Bayat *et al* (2014) have suggested that this is unlikely given the demographic to which the learners in my study belong, as generally speaking "coloured" and "African" children have a culturally entrenched low regard for the importance of schooling.

### **6.2.5 Performing Well in Response to Social Injustices**

As evidenced in my writings above, good academic performance in the lives of the learners in my study is not only something seldom achieved, but oftentimes it is seldom expected. Defying such expectations proved to be but one response on the part of learners to their common experiences of social injustices. The following words of Zac and Daina are of significance in this regard:

*Often You are doing your work, hoping to do well, but then distractions happen, example: other learners start doing something more fun than learning, like playing games and making fun of others, so then you feel tempted join in, as that is what is expected of you; but I find it's best to resist- **Zac***

*In school the teachers let the learners misbehave, they don't listen, they talk and there are times when you want to concentrate on the work but you can't because of the disruptive surroundings. You work hard anyway, despite these surroundings because you want to do well even if no one really expects it –**Daina***

Both Zac and Daina make mention of expectations exerted on learners by others, such expectations in being rather low, can in my view, be considered social injustices as they somewhat hinder learners' academic growth. In further support of my view, Freire (1996) has contended that when learners simply accept roles forced on them by those perceived to be in power this behaviour only enhances their status as passive recipients of knowledge. Where Zac and Daina tend to differ slightly is in respect of what exactly is expected of one through the expectations mentioned above. While Zac makes reference to an expectation placed on one to misbehave rather than engage in school work, Daina makes mention of an expectation to perform badly. Both expectations in my view are encouraging learners to remain in passive roles in which being empowered to take control of one's own learning is almost impossible.

Despite Zac and Daina's difference, they both allude to the requirement of resistance to overcome what is expected of them. Thus, what remains common in both extracts is that one must resist what is expected of one, whether it be to misbehave or perform badly, in order to achieve academic success. I am therefore inclined to contend that the learners in my study attempt to perform well as a direct response to the ongoing experiences of social injustices. As mentioned in my literature review Freire (1996) argues that normalising oppressive occurrences in a structure through repetition of oppression must be brought to the light of day to be seen as oppression itself. Thus learners' active attempts to perform well, despite constant and repeated exposure to social injustices propagated by a structure that imposes expectations on them are in fact a way of bringing this matter to the light of day so as to adequately address it. Resisting the forces of an oppressive structure already in place certainly acts as evidence to suggest the existence of critical consciousness on the part of the learners in my study.

*The world is our oyster and for us to indulge, but it's difficult to see it like that when everyone is just failing and no one seems to care-**Erin***

The importance of academic success is evident in respect of one's attainment of economic success. The words of Erin, above, tend to evoke this sentiment. It is this need for economic success amongst the marginalised that tends to spur one's fight for academic success. This is likely because the two cannot be separated as asserted by Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) who appear to be of the belief that without academic success, one often does not reach economic success in a world in which academics and economics become so easily intertwined.

The determination expressed by the learners in my study to perform well despite the constant onslaught of social injustices in their daily lives is of particular significance in the South African context. This is because Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) go on to argue that after more than 20 years of democracy many a South African facing social injustices remains disillusioned about future prosperity; in particular in education due to a prevailing lack of accountability on the part of those in power. Such lack of accountability is evidenced in the low expectations exerted on learners by teachers, as surely overtly expecting learners to perform poorly, and then indeed having them perform poorly should, in my opinion, induce some accountability for such performance.

Many a learner remains under the impression accountability is a foreign concept. The learners in my study, although all marginalised, do tend to come from a multitude of backgrounds. Sadly these varying backgrounds are not considered when accountability efforts and general attempts at improvements are made in the educational lives of learners contemporarily (Sims, 2013). The following words of Britany, Clint, Erin, Khethiwe and Lawrence tend to highlight the need for further accentuation on learners' varying backgrounds.

*I do sacrifice my sleep, quite often so I can study, this is encouraged by my parents. I do it because I know if I want to become what I want to become I need to put in the work now.-**Britany***

*I do receive help from my family in the sense that they create and allow an atmosphere of learning. They will turn off the TV if I need to study, but that's about all the help I will get- **Clint***

*My aunt encourages me to work harder by reminding me that success is something I have to obtain myself, nobody will just give it to me-**Erin***

*Society puts coloureds in a box as being good for nothing but drinking. I find it is this sort of behaviour that is encouraged where I live- **Khethiwe***

*Doing badly is a fashion trend in this school, you are accepted if you perform badly. My family has advised me to blend in so as to stay out of trouble – **Lawrence***

Notwithstanding Britany, Clint and Erin's experiences of positive assistance it is sadly apparent that Khethiwe and Lawrence have been at the receiving end of rather negative assistance, which in my view, is no assistance at all. Khethiwe alludes to being encouraged to engage in, or at least prepare to engage in, drinking simply by virtue of being. Lawrence, however, has interpreted his family's advice of merely blending in as a sort of encouragement to perform badly. These accounts are certainly not surprising as Bayat *et al* (2014) have indicated that many youth face severe consequences ranging from being ostracised to being physically assaulted should they not conform to societal norms imposed on them. Lawrence and Khethiwe in light of Bayat *et al*'s (2014) claim likely face immense pressure to conform.

The uniqueness of the contexts from which each of these learners have emerged is most certainly in my opinion, and according to Sims (2013) grounds to warrant paying attention to varying backgrounds when accountability efforts and general attempts at improvements in education are made. Otherwise, as Sims (2013) noted little improvement in performance amongst learners from marginalised communities will take place. My next theme, following from the present focusses on learners succeeding in a context in which few care as a direct response to social injustices, and thus quite appropriately includes extracts focusing on how learners engage with others, whether it be teachers, parents or NGO's with respect to their academic performance.

## 6.2.6 Succeeding Where No-one Cares is a Response to Social Injustices

Following from the previous theme which focused on learners performing well despite constant experiences of social injustices, and low expectations, a focus on learners succeeding in a context in which no one seems to care appeared logical to me. Thus, in this theme I rely on the words of the learners in my study as I analyse accounts of success in a context which plays host to few or none who care.

In the following two extracts Tatum and Nicole recall instances in which assistance was required to help them succeed academically and yet, sadly, nobody seemed to care enough to provide such assistance. At least seeming to care, in my view, can relate to issues of accountability. But, where those in positions of power are not held accountable, others dependent on the powerful suffer immensely (Sims, 2013).



Figure 6.3: Typical seating arrangements in the classrooms

*Often in our classes it gets frustrating if you really want to learn because if you ask the teacher to explain they don't want to as they think you were one of those not paying attention. Then if you ask another learner to explain, they don't know what's going on either. I often end up making sense of things myself- **Tatum***

*Sometimes when you ask another learner for help with something you don't understand, the way they respond makes you want to take back ever asking them. Because they give you such attitude as if asking them for help is a burden, so I rather just struggle on my own until I eventually get the work right- **Nicole***



*I tend not to ask people for help because of embarrassment. I usually just battle through the work alone. I don't want to put myself in a position where people will look down on me, as other learners tend to do if you ask for help with your work.- Clint*

Clint's account above, unlike Tatum and Nicole's accounts does not seem to hinge so much on nobody caring, but rather leans more towards his own reluctance to ask for assistance. His words suggest a sense of pride which prevent him from seeking assistance which ultimately bares the same result as experienced by Tatum and Nicole. The same result to which I refer, is that Clint, just like Tatum and Nicole is left to make sense of the work himself. Freire (1996) when speaking about the problem-posing concept of education contends that no-one should teach another, but at the same time no-one should be self-taught as teacher and student should teach each other, mediated by the world. This, Freire (1996) argues will ensure a more equitable distribution of power.

In the extract below, Khethiwe although not mentioning pride like Clint or a lack of caring on the part of others like Tatum and Nicole; her words nevertheless suggest that she too faces the same fate as Tatum, Nicole and Clint in that she too is left having to battle through the work herself. Khethiwe's reasoning seems to centre on her valuing of her time as she fears that extra lessons may indeed simply waste her time as expressed below:

*I've never been to extra classes before, I do think I should go to help me improve, but then I am uncertain about going because I have heard that those people just take your money and waste your time. I could rather use that time to study on my own- Khethiwe*

The attitude of teachers towards learners seems to play a role in respect of the learners' experiences of a lack of caring where assistance is required, such is evidenced in the words expressed by Britany and Toby below:

*Many teachers only get upset and put pressure on the top academic learners to do well, and to do their homework. If a learner who always does badly doesn't do their homework the teachers seem to have that "oh it's just you" kind of attitude. Therefore when these learners do occasionally*

*perform well, they do it simply for themselves as the teacher will remain unimpressed, or so it seems*

**-Britany**

*A lot of teachers seem to think that there is no hope for you anyway so why waste their time. If you want to do well academically, you simply do it for yourself-* **Toby**

It seems as though Britany and Toby too are left having to rely heavily on themselves to succeed academically as they depict instances in which very little is expected of each of them by teachers. Again, were the roles assigned to these learners by low expectations simply accepted they would only, as Freire (1996) may be inclined to argue, be buying into their passive roles in society which make it ever easier to oppress them. The reasons for neither asking for, nor receiving assistance to succeed academically appear to differ greatly amongst the learners in my study; and yet all seem to stem from being educated in a context riddled with social injustices. The ability of these learners to speak about their experiences remains commendable and acts in favour of achieving social justice. This is because Young (2000) has asserted that matters threatening social justice should be fought in the light of day, rather than have them remain lurking about in the dark.

A lack of caring, as claimed above, is a social injustice as far as I am concerned, especially when many other learners learn in contexts of caring. Also, being stripped of one's pride is a social injustice when many other learners learn in contexts in which they never have to fear such an experience. Nevertheless, what remains common amongst the learners in my study, as suggested in the extracts above is the fact that these learners do indeed seek ways of succeeding in a context in which few care.

Seeking ways to succeed in such a context, to me, suggests actions of constant reflecting and reforming, keeping the learners in a state of constantly becoming. Remaining in this incomplete, yet cognitive state, Freire (1996) argues, promotes critical consciousness. Thus, the learners in my study in accordance with Welsh's (2014) assertion concerning the ability to rebel against oppression certainly do appear ready to rebel against oppression, which has become so commonplace in their learning context. They rebel against oppression by succeeding as a direct response to the many social injustices experienced by them in their

spaces of teaching and learning. Thus, their finding ways to succeed in such a context can justifiably be viewed as but one of many responses to experiences of social injustices.

### **6.2.7 Seeking Alternative Sources of Help is a Response to Social Injustices**

In previous themes and in particular in the theme directly preceding this one, it became apparent that the learners in my study have very few sources of help when trying to succeed academically. In addition to their few sources, it was also established that assistance from the available sources, i.e. teachers and other learners, tends to come at a price. In this theme I thus shift my attention towards learners' seeking of alternative sources of help in their quest to succeed academically despite their contexts of social injustices.

Epstein and Dauber (1989) who have focussed much of their work on parent involvement in schools, argue that seeking help from parents limits assistance to academics related only to homework and the effectiveness of such help is dependent on parents' understandings of teachers' practices. Thus, parents who are unfamiliar with unique practices adopted by specific teachers may, in their attempt to help, serve only to confuse learners further. Nevertheless, in the following extracts it is evident that many learners in my study turn to people living in the same household as themselves as an alternative source of help:

*My mother takes my phone away from me when I get home so that I can focus on my school work. She works in a prison so she's very strict. She then has me do my homework and bring it to her to check. I sometimes ask her for help, but only in subjects that I know she will be able to help with, like English or Afrikaans. When it comes to things like Maths or Science, just forget it. - Erin*

*My physics teacher will always ask me after the lesson if I understand what we just did. That helps me change my mindset. My mother really tries to create a positive space for learning. She encourages me to take breaks from studying and she won't speak to me about school work in the break. -Britany*

*My aunt tries to help me through words, she is very religious so she relies on words from scripture to motivate me. My mum used to try to help me with my work, if I was confused she would try to do it with me. But unfortunately I have lost both of my parents now- Khethiwe*

*My older sister did the same subjects as me so often she can help me with work that confuses me, but I always have to ask her. She won't just offer. -Lawrence*

Of the learners whose words are shared above, it appears as though only Erin is fortunate enough to receive direct assistance with her school work from one of her parents. Nevertheless, this assistance remains somewhat restricted to particular subjects in particular, English and Afrikaans are mentioned. Erin specifically mentions the fact that assistance in subjects like Maths and Science cannot be sought from her mother. Braund and Reiss (2006), whose work is focussed on the importance of out-of-school learning, contend that out-of-school learning remains relevant and grows evermore necessary in a fast-paced contemporary society. However, Braund and Reiss (2006) also argue that failure to assist learners in subjects such as Mathematics and Science only serves to add to the negativity and stigma surrounding these subjects while such subjects continue to face a decline in attitudes of learners towards them on a global scale. Thus, Erin's mother, although well-meaning in her attempts to assist, could, in my view, be contributing to the growing stigma surrounding Mathematics and Science displayed by many learners contemporarily.

Britany's mother, although not providing any direct assistance with school work does help in the sense that she provides an environment conducive to Britany attaining academic success. I would like to refer to this sort of assistance as indirect assistance. To my mind Britany's mother achieves this by creating a positive and pleasant environment in which academics and the often associated stresses are not the focal point. This is evident as Britany herself indicates that her mother, after encouraging her to take a break, refuses to speak to her about her school work. Esau (2017) in a chapter in which he focuses on emancipatory action research contends that those charged with assisting learners along their journeys of learning need to reflect not just on teaching practices but also on the environment in which learning is expected to happen. Thus, the attempts of Britany's mother to create an environment conducive to learning (What I am calling indirect assistance) would likely, in my opinion, positively influence Britany's learning. A positive experience of learning should, bearing in mind the work of Deleuze (1994), pave the way for the possibility of a positive imagining of the attainment of academic success.

Remaining on this point of indirect assistance, Khethiwe's aunt, very similarly provides assistance in the form of positive words of encouragement. The sharing of such words with Khethiwe is aimed at motivating her to try to perform well despite her, in my opinion, very sad circumstances. The circumstances to which I refer is the fact that Khethiwe lost both of her parents to a car crash just two years prior to my interviewing her. Not entirely relevant to my study, but from a purely affective perspective, I feel it incumbent upon myself to mention that having to continue to learn and still perform well academically in the face of such tragedy is certainly a very sad situation which should not, ideally be brought upon anyone.

I thus feel that Khethiwe's unique circumstances can in fact be viewed as a social injustice. However, I will not address this particular injustice as it goes beyond the ambit of my study which focuses primarily on learners' common experiences of social injustices. Accordingly, the uniqueness of Khethiwe's sad situation renders it beyond the scope of my study. The relevance however, of Khetiwe's narrative is, in my view, the fact that just like Brittany she too, is provided with indirect assistance in the form of the providing of a more positive environment for learning. The positive controlling of a learning environment, Esau (2017) has argued, will rid such environment of factors which may be contrary to the promotion of emancipation in respect of an already oppressed people. Thus, the actions of Khetiwe's aunt are relevant in my study as they serve to assist in the emancipation of Khetiwe, which based on arguments put forward above, will help her more easily imagine the attainment of academic success.

Moving away from the seeking of assistance from parents or parent figures, Lawrence introduces a new dimension to this analysis in that he admits to seeking assistance from his older sister. The assistance which Lawrence seeks and receives would more than likely be direct assistance as his sister has completed the same subjects just a few years prior to him, and thus possesses an understanding intricate enough to assist Lawrence, should he experience difficulty with his school work. The seeking, and receiving of assistance from his sister certainly places Lawrence in a somewhat better position than many to attain academic success. This is so, despite his daily experiences of social injustices. Epstein and Dauber (1989) have contended that when those assisting learners outside of the school possess an understanding of the content and material with which they are assisting the likelihood of

mastering of the content in respect of learners who are being assisted increases exponentially. Lawrence would therefore, also find it somewhat easier than many to imagine achieving academic success as his path to achieving success is paved arguably better than those assisted by others who do not understand the content and certainly those who go unassisted outside of the school.

The sources of help, in respect of the learners whose words are shared above, may differ. The sort of help, i.e. direct or indirect, tends to differ and even the degree to which help is provided seems to differ. But, what remains common amongst each of Erin, Britany, Khethiwe and Lawrence is that help is sought from an alternative source, i.e. a source other than one within the school. Braund and Reiss (2006) have postulated that the mere seeking of help outside of the school in an ever changing and competitive society certainly bodes well in respect of beginning to promote greater parental involvement in the academic development of learners. This, Braund and Reiss (2006) contend can only enhance a collective involvement in developing a more capable future generation. Certainly, in my opinion, the enhancement of the capabilities of a future generation will serve to promote a more equitable society and therefore a more socially just society.

Above, a clear picture, in respect of the learners in my study and their seeking of help is presented. The picture depicts the following: rather than simply succumbing to the lack of help available in their immediate contexts of teaching and learning, which is a social injustice, the learners in my study seek help from alternative sources as a direct response to social injustices. This is because, in actively seeking help from alternative sources to better one's chances of obtaining academic success, one is showing resilience to the immediate socially unjust context of teaching and learning and so responding to a glaring social injustice in this manner. Thus, I am inclined to argue that the seeking of help from alternative sources is indeed a response to social injustices. Responding in this manner, will likely result in a greater probability of one being able to imagine achieving academic success despite one's immediate context of teaching and learning.

### **6.3 Theme 5: Imagining Ways to Address Social Injustices**

The transcendence of, or at least the desire to, transcend one's circumstances appeared common amongst the learners in my study. They each, in one way or another imagined a new beginning or a way forward which ultimately led them out of their present circumstances which were all too often riddled with social injustices. Earlier in my analysis it became evident that very often school rules were not followed, thus resulting in a very chaotic and often unpleasant environment of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, many learners were indeed able to imagine change to such an extent that school rules would certainly be valued. I turn now to my first sub-theme which deals with the imaginings of change as well as the valuing of school rules.

#### **6.3.1 Imagining Change and the Valuing of School Rules**

Common amongst the shared words of the learners which follows is the mention of school rules and imaginings of these rules being followed. However, it is the accompanying imaginings of change that follow and enable the following of rules on which I would like to focus. The words shared in the following extracts are, in my opinion, very powerful and moving as far as one's imaging of change which would enable the following of rules and the aiding of one to attain academic success is concerned.

I do feel it necessary to remind the reader at this juncture that Deleuze (1994) has postulated that repetition does not bring into effect physical change, but rather change begins in the mind of the observer, thus implying the necessity of a change in one's imagining so as to effect change in the physical world. The words of Erin, Toby and Zac each evoke a realisation to me, and hopefully to the reader, that the learners in my study not only imagine themselves performing well but also imagine the sort of changes required in their physical worlds to do so.

*Once you ignite that fire within yourself, it is difficult to keep it burning because a bad environment influences our thinking. We are faced with peer pressure and illegal substances. This environment must change before my fire dies. I therefore imagine a school in which people's individuality is respected so we are not forced to follow the crowd. I imagine a school in which all illegal substances never see the light of day. Yes, in such a school I could most definitely perform well because the environment would not kill my fire but maybe even fuel it. –Erin*



**Figure 6.4: Sign turned upside-down to confuse new learners**

*Upside down sign reminds me of all the people who bunk and run around the school doing nonsense with the teachers chasing them. They probably did that to the sign. This sort of behaviour just goes on and on. Most of these people don't value education much and that's why they don't value the property of the school. I wish they would leave. So, I imagine a school without these kind of people, one where they have all left and only the good learners who follow school rules remain-**Toby***

*I failed a Technology test because of something silly. We were going to Technology but ended up being late because two of my friends were fighting over R 2. One friend slapped the other and other children started watching and laughing. This blocked the way and made us all late for class. If such a silly thing didn't happen we would have got there on time and got the right information for our test the next day..... So, I imagine a school without violence, a school where people don't look for silly distractions but rather focus on what school should be about, academics, school work, knowledge etc. This would be the case anyway if school rules were followed. I can see myself doing very well in a school like that. I can just imagine it. There I am getting awards for doing well at my subjects, getting into university and being on a great path to success in my life- **Zac***

Erin imagines a school without illegal substances and peer pressure, while Toby imagines a school without people who have an inclination to break school rules. Zac imagines a school without violence and the seeking of silly distractions. It thus becomes apparent to me that



each of the learners mentioned above possess an imagining which subtracts something from their already existing schooling environment.

Ricoeur (1978) has proffered that feelings are interiorized thoughts which often complete the work of imagination, and it is thus impossible to engage in any semantic inquiry into imagination without a psychological component which would include both image and feeling. In my study, as explained previously, I used images to evoke memories of experiences. It is therefore not surprising to me that the learners in my study, when imagining, wish to remove negatives, often instances of oppression or circumstances that resulted in oppression of which they were reminded through the images presented to them. Thus, Ricoeur's (1978) assertion is of relevance in my study as I would go so far as to contend that a subtraction of feelings associated with images is evident in the imaginings of the learners. They do this in an attempt to remove whatever they have deemed to have resulted in, or contributed to their experiences of oppression in one way or another. Thus, they may then imagine a set of circumstances that may foster the attainment of academic success.

On the face of it mere subtraction rather than addition may seem somewhat simple and easily attainable as an inherent implication associated with subtraction is that one already has what is required in an environment to attain academic success. Thus, all that is required is the subtraction of something. The simple subtraction would therefore render the environment conducive to academic success, or so one may be inclined to believe. Ricoeur (1978) when speaking about imagination and its relation to images reminds us that Aristotle suggested that in the work of resemblance a pictorial or iconic moment is implied. Thus, images which bear some resemblance to experience, remain somewhat attached to iconic moments in one's life.

Accordingly, I would argue then, that to simply remove the moment of negativity or in the case of the learners in my study, the moment of oppression, may require removing the entire image itself which gave rise to the recollection. But, without the image, it is possible that experiences themselves, which, for the purposes of my study, need to have an imagined transcendence attached to them, will cease to be recalled. Accordingly, mere subtraction of the experience would not enable one to imagine a way towards success. I would therefore

suggest the merging of the experience of oppression with the possibility of attaining success, but through using imagination as a sort of go-between which will merge two unmergables as suggested by Deleuze (1994).

Nevertheless, common in the words of the learners shared above is the requirement for school rules to be followed. If, simple subtraction of circumstances and experiences may in most cases result in the following of school rules, it is here that I would contend one may encounter some difficulty. This is because Thornberg (2008), on school management, has postulated that the application and following of school rules in reality is not as easy as it may appear on paper. Thus, putting into effect the imagined subtraction may be somewhat difficult. Nevertheless, the learners in my study do indeed imagine change to such an extent that school rules are followed. To their minds this would then result in an environment far more conducive to the attainment of academic success than the environment in which they presently find themselves. Accordingly, the transcendence of circumstances riddled with social injustices would suddenly become a great possibility for the learners in my study.

### **6.3.2 Imagining Change and the Valuing of School Property**

*I belong to the Eco club. We have a garden. But our garden used to die most of the time because there wouldn't be anyone interested in watering it. But when I did get involved I actually felt good because I could see results from my hard work when the garden finally grew well. We need more things like this that motivate you to want to do stuff instead of everything just being a waste of time. That results in failure. I therefore imagine a school in which more people care about the environment as this would create a space in which you want to succeed.- **Tatum***



Figure 6.5: A grill between staircases

*There's a grill in the way to stop people from throwing things down the steps, but it's pointless because people still do stupid things when walking down the stairs. It's very off-putting, not at all inviting; it makes the school look like a jail, but it's stupid anyway, and really shouldn't be there. I imagine myself going to a school that does not look like a jail and is more inviting, people would have more respect for such a place-**Toby***

*Those are steps that I always seem to fall on. There's always litter on these steps. I think it makes it slippery. It shows that these people don't care about their surroundings. I would feel more motivated to be there if a simple thing like keeping steps clean took place. I imagine a school with no litter. I would be much happier in a place like that and so I would work harder.- **Britany***

*Yesterday I saw people throw packets on the floor when the bin was not even two steps away from them, it's disgusting. But that's how little they think of their learning environment. I feel people like that should just stay at home because obviously they don't want to be here so they make things unpleasant for everyone else. That must change. They must stay at home! I imagine a school where people with such a poor attitude just stay at home- **Lawrence***

In the extracts above, a disregard for school property and in particular, a disregard for the environment of teaching and learning seem to be evident. Kruss (2009) whose work focusses on the contexts of education has asserted that valuing of school property can be associated with a sense of pride in one's environment which naturally results in a more conducive environment for teaching and learning. The learners whose words are shared above each seem to imagine a schooling environment somewhat different from what they presently face. They do indeed tend to be of the view that their imagined environment would be, to an extent, more conducive to the attainment of academic success than the environment which

they face in reality. Imagining an alternative may pave the way to its attainment in reality (Deleuze, 1994).

Britany, who imagines a school with no litter, goes as far as arguing that she would be much happier in such a place and would therefore be inclined to work much harder. This tends to correspond with Kruss's (2009) assertion that pride in one's environment results in a more conducive environment for teaching and learning. Needless to mention working harder, in many instances does result in greater academic success. I therefore believe that implicit in Britany's argument that an environment free of litter would result in her working hard, is the suggestion that such an environment would be more conducive to her attainment of academic success.

Closely related to Britany's sentiment are the words of Tatum. This is because just like Britany's implication that her imagined environment would be more conducive to academic success is Tatum's claim that a school in which more people cared about the environment would create a space in which one wants to succeed. It is my assertion, at this juncture, that a profound desire to succeed would likely aid the attainment of academic success. Thus, both Britany and Tatum's imagined environments would likely ultimately yield similar or the same results, i.e. the attainment of academic success.

Toby too imagines change in his immediate environment of teaching and learning. He imagines a school that does not resemble a jail. Unlike Britany and Tatum, whose imaginings can be equated with a likelihood of attaining academic success, Toby's imagining of a school less like a jail is, according to Toby, an environment that would be somewhat more inviting than his present schooling environment. Thus, his imagining, at first glance, appears less related to the attainment of academic success but nevertheless remains closely aligned with the creation of an environment in which one desires to be present due to its inviting nature. This, in my opinion, is nevertheless equally as important as Britany and Tatum's imaginings. I am of this opinion because Hannah (2013) echoes Kruss's (2009) assertion arguing that being educated in an environment in which one finds to be inviting often promotes the attainment of academic success.

Finally, Lawrence shifts the focus of the discussion away from one's physical surrounds such as cleaner steps and a school that looks less like a jail, and moves towards a focus on the people who are physically present in the school. Lawrence imagines a school in which people with a poor attitude simply stay at home. Here, he refers specifically to people who litter in and around the school. This therefore forges a distinct correlation between his imagining and the imagining of Britany as she too imagines a school free from litter, although unlike Lawrence she does not go as far as imagining the specific exclusion of those with a poor attitude who are responsible for causing such litter.

In addition to the correlation with Britany's imagining, Tatum's imagining too resonates with that of Lawrence as they both tend to focus on people physically present in the school, their attitudes and their relation to a more pleasant imagined environment. Gustafsson (2011) in my literature review has contended that when learners have a greater sense of responsibility that sense of responsibility is often transferred to their attitude towards schooling. Accordingly, Hannah's (2013) call for learners to take responsibility in promoting and fostering a sense of pride in their learning environments so as to have environments more conducive to teaching and learning can certainly support Gustafsson's (2011) contention. It thus appears that Britany and Toby focus their imaginings on physical surrounds whereas Tatum and Lawrence focus their imaginings on people and their attitudes and sense of responsibility; all of which bare some relation to creating a more pleasant environment.

Above, it is apparent that all four participants share a distinct focus on imagining an environment in which change takes place such that the school property is respected. This is the case irrespective as to whether an imagining of people being physically excluded is in play or whether changes are made to the physical environment such as an environment less jail like or simply one with less litter. Ultimately, all four participants seem to imagine change that induces the respecting of school property and having a greater sense of pride and responsibility for one's school. I would argue that such change, should it occur, may place one in better standing to achieve academic success. Thus, beginning to imagine such changes may, in my view, illuminate a way towards achieving such changes in reality.

### 6.3.3 Imagining Success; Ending at the Starting Point

The extracts and analyses that follow are centred on the imagining of success. The focus of my study is indeed on the imagining of success. I would thus, at this juncture, like to take this opportunity to remind the reader that Vinz (1997) contends that the telling of an imaginative story helps one confront conditions which may contribute to a current way of being. The participants in my study were faced with having to confront experiences of social injustice and yet still achieve academic success so as to transcend their circumstances. The transcendence of their circumstances would likely be made possible by beginning to imagine success. Thus, the extracts and analyses that follow are most relevant for, and indeed pertinent to, ensuring that I, in the write up of this thesis, remained in line with what it was, I initially set out to do. I therefore feel it appropriate that by this point in my analysis I have gone full circle, so to speak and accordingly end off where I began.

*“Complete Social Justice is far greater than one can imagine. Therefore, we need a realistic imagining”- My own thoughts emerging through embarking on this journey (Wade Cafun, 2017)*

*I imagine performing well, and not being distracted by temptations, because temptations are a major bring down on a student’s progress-Clint*

*I imagine not having to fight to keep my fire burning while still finding myself as a teenager. This would be a lot easier if people around us didn’t try to bring us down. I imagine myself being very successful-Erin*

Both Clint and Erin express an awareness of the fact that they need to find ways of being successful despite external factors which may, in their words, “bring one down.” Clint views temptations as the external factor which may hinder one’s attainment of success while Erin views her fight to keep her fire burning as the factor which may prevent her from attaining success. External factors which prevail within schools, as Spaul (2011) has contended, can indeed be rather demotivating. Day and Fiske (2017) have called for schools to act as engines of social mobility in the attainment of social justice. However, in order to begin to realise the changes required to improve one’s learning environment and so achieve success divorcing oneself from one’s material realities is necessitated (Vinz, 1997). As identified

earlier, one way to do this is through the use of imagination (Deleuze, 1994). The learners in my study are thus, in my opinion, justified in imagining success despite the prevalence of external factors in their immediate surrounds which arguably thwart the attainment of academic success.

Presumably then, the fight to which Erin refers is an internal fight, perhaps to keep motivated despite being discouraged by what she may experience externally. Indeed resilience on the part of both Clint and Erin is evident as they both acknowledge having to overcome one occurrence or another in their imaginings of ways to be academically successful. They do this in a context and a schooling system which is enforcing the social and economic marginalisation of the poor and vulnerable, as contended by Bloch (2009). Thus, I would even go as far as arguing that the ability of learners to rebel against a system within which they find themselves and the necessity of such rebellion in the face of oppression as argued by Welsh (2014) is certainly of relevance in my study. In order for learners to remain resilient despite the schooling system with which they are faced the ability to rebel is most certainly required. However, given that peaceful, non-violent rebellion should always be preferred in a civilized society, I am thus inclined to highlight further and argue in favour of the need for the learners in my study to be able to imagine conditions and yes, a system contrary to the one with which they are faced. They should, in my view, begin by attempting to imagine success and the conditions conducive to attaining it. Only then, I would argue, can one begin the journey towards converting such imaginings to reality.

*I imagine myself being successful and so proving others wrong-**Britany***

*The negativity from peers does help me succeed as it makes me want to prove them wrong, so yes I also imagine myself being successful and proving others wrong. **Bianca***

*I am really interested in cars and imagine myself being a successful engineer who will prove that women can do just as well as men, and maybe even better. -**Sindisiwe***

Moving away from one's imagining of success despite external factors, I draw the reader's focus now to the words of Britany, Bianca and Sindisiwe in the extracts above. Each of these three young ladies, in their imaginings, hint at attaining success for the purpose of proving

others wrong. Britany simply, and quite bluntly admitted that she imagines being successful just to prove others wrong with no further elaboration.

Being successful, on the parts of the learners in my study could, in my view, be aligned with Freire's (1996) call for the marginalised to reject an oppressive structure, rather than perpetuate it through the act of knowing. I am thus inclined to argue that learners should rather imagine a structure which fosters their attainment of academic success. It is therefore evident that a dislodging through the use of imagination of what is known from experience is required, as suggested by Vinz (1997).

In the absence of elaboration as to why Britany wishes to prove others wrong, Bianca and Sindisiwe's words do nevertheless suggest some justifications as to why they wish to use success to prove others wrong. On the one hand Bianca's words suggest that her desire to be successful bears some relation to curbing negativity received from some of her peers. But on the other hand, Sindisiwe's desire to be successful rests in her wanting to prove women's equality to men. Undoubtedly Sindisiwe, and the community from which she comes, still view engineering, and working with cars, as a male dominated profession.

Sexism has certainly been identified as one of several forms of oppression by Hardiman and Jackson (1997) with others including racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism and religious oppression. In being a form of oppression which is likely embraced in the context in which Sindisiwe finds herself having to attempt to achieve success, again one comes to realise the need for rebellion against an already existing system or structure as highlighted by Welsh (2014). The need to rebel in order to effect change on an already existing structure undoubtedly feeds into Freire's (1996) assertion that structural transformation is required to aid the liberation of the oppressed.

*I imagine myself finding answers and solutions to problems in my life that never seem to end. I think that's all most people in my school want. If we can do that we will be in a better position to do well academically-Raymond*



*I imagine myself being successful, but only if I can find time and the right space to study. If I can do that, I see myself being very successful-Khethiwe*

*For me, the start of success will be moving out of my mother's house so I can be an independent man of my own, I most definitely imagine myself doing this once I am successful enough with money. I imagine myself having lots of money. Then I will be successful-Lawrence*

Raymond, Khethiwe and Lawrence, in their imaginings, do not focus on success to prove others wrong. But rather, the commonality in the words shared by each of them appears to be the realisation that obtaining success is easier if one is faced with better circumstances. Each of them makes reference to one or another circumstance which they believe, if changed, would better the conduciveness to their attainment of success. Thus, the need for structural transformation to aid the attainment of success and ultimately the liberation of these marginalised learners through helping them transcend their current circumstances is once again highlighted. Thus, the relevance of Freire's (1996) work appears fundamental to, and inescapable in my study.

Finding solutions to problems which plague one's life is what Raymond identifies in his imagining as a circumstance that, if changed for the better, would make the attainment of academic success easier. Khethiwe identifies the need to have a study space as the circumstance which needs to change in her life in order to make the attainment of success that much easier for her. Esau (2017) has highlighted the need for an environment conducive to learning, especially in respect of disadvantaged learners.

Finally, Lawrence identifies circumstances changing with regards to finances as what needs to change in order to make his attainment of success easier. Indeed access to economic power makes the attainment of success much easier, thus perpetuating an elevated status amongst the economic elite as highlighted by Bloch (2009). Thus, attaining academic success in the absence of economic power certainly broadens the possibility for an oppressed and marginalised group to finally transcend their circumstances. The gap between the economic elite and those trapped behind the building blocks of a second economy to which

Bloch (2009) refers will thus be reduced. Certainly then, a more socially just environment will prevail.

In all of the extracts above, each of the eight participants whose words have been shared, express an imagining of success. However, they all seem to have different reasons for desiring success as well as different ideas of what may assist in their attainment of academic success. Britany, Bianca and Sindisiwe each desire success to prove others wrong. Clint and Erin are each driven by resilience to achieve success and view this as reason enough to fight for it. Raymond. Khethiwe and Lawrence view the changing of one's circumstances as a factor which may assist in their attainment of success. Each of these three have identified different circumstances as the ones which need to change in order for them to attain success.

Wentzel and Wigfield (2007) postulate that a diversity in reasons for wanting success as well as a diversity in approaches to obtain success can be attributed to a diversity in past experiences. Although each of the learners in my study have experienced social injustices in one way or another their individual experiences do indeed differ greatly. Hence, the diverse reasons for wanting success and the diverse imagined approaches evidenced in the extracts above, in light of Wentzel and Wigfield's (2007) postulation, does not strike me as particularly surprising.

What does strike me as interesting, however, is how realistic each of the learners were in their imaginings. They were realistic in the sense that learners recognised that circumstances needed to change in order to obtain success rather than merely imagining the snatching of success out of nothing. The idea of imagining realistically and so taking into consideration one's actual surrounds resonates with the writings of Langland-Hassan (2014) whose work I have mentioned in my literature review chapter.

Langland-Hassan's (2014) contention that two poles of imagination exist is of relevance in this analysis. This is because the two poles to which Langland-Hassan (2014) refers merely represent the merging of experiences with desires. This process of merging experiences with

desires is indeed evident in the extracts expressed above as each of the learners considered their experiences when imagining what circumstances needed to change in order to obtain academic success. The significance of imagining realistically when attempting to promote a socially just setting, as noted in the quotation by an “almost unknown” author above, is thus highlighted.

In addition, Deleuze (1994) has averred that imagination may be used as a means by which what previously seemed incapable of being merged may indeed be merged. I have also highlighted in my theoretical framework how using the work of Deleuze (1994), imagination may be used as a vehicle for liberation, especially when merging what otherwise may not have been merged. My interest in the ideas of merging what may otherwise not have been merged and the need for one to imagine realistically which have emerged through the process of my data analysis is accordingly reaffirmed.

#### **6.3.4 Imagining the Ideal End Result**

In my literature review chapter I highlighted the fact that Bell (1997) was of the belief that social justice is both an ideal and a goal. Thus, social justice remains something to which one ought to constantly strive to achieve. However, in being an ideal, finding complete social justice in reality remains, in my opinion, highly improbable. The extracts that follow therefore represent but some instances in which the learners in my study imagined this ideal which may or may not exist in reality.

*I imagine myself receiving much encouragement from family, friends and even teachers, their words of encouragement would lift my spirits, and that would just fit in well with a scenario where I am very successful first with my school work and then in life-**Britany***

*I imagine myself being offered everything I ever desired. For me, mechanical engineering comes close because of my love for cars. So, I imagine being able to study all the subjects I love and none of the ones I don't like. But I imagine doing it in an environment that is like the real workshops cars are designed in, I imagine our school workshops being like that-**Erin***

*I imagine myself owning a flying car so I can fly over the houses of those who doubted me and drop poop bombs on them. I would come to school in that car too, but it would be a school that I enjoy attending with my flying car. I imagine going to a school that actually teaches me how to build such a car, so maybe in my second year of high school I can start using this car-***Toby**

*I imagine myself owning a prestigious engineering company, even though I am not sure how to go about getting this. So, I would also imagine being taught how to achieve this goal at school-*  
**Lawrence**

Each of the learners whose words are shared above, appear to imagine some ideal end result which to them is representative of success. Britany imagines being very successful with her school work, and ultimately with life. Achieving life success is most certainly the ideal end result as far as Britany is concerned. Erin imagines being able to do every subject which she loves in an environment in which she enjoys being. On the point of environment, Toby imagines learning at a school in which he enjoys attending. However, his end result of success is owning a flying car. Lawrence's imagined end result as far as success is concerned is his owning of a prestigious engineering company. Lawrence does however; imagine attending a school which serves as a means by which to aid him in achieving his imagined end result.

Young (2000) has argued that people should individually and collectively constantly strive to achieve social justice as a completely socially just space remains non-existent as an ideal. Thus, my calling on the learners in my study to simply imagine this ideal end result, rather than recall something that likely never existed seemed rather logical. This approach also seemed to be in line with Vinz's (1997) assertion that embedded meanings must be dislodged so as to free the mind and therefore enable the exploration of multiple solutions to a problem. In the instance of my study the problem was learner poor performance and the necessity to use imagination to bring one closer to the possibility of attaining academic success.

Common in the imaginings expressed above is the fact that each of these learners do link an imagined idea of school to help them achieve their imagined end result. This is of significance to me as it clearly suggests that the learners in my study do indeed remain cognisant of the imperative role schooling plays in their achieving of imagined end results.

Thus, the imagining of an ideal in respect of schooling is once again brought to the fore in my study. Accordingly, the significance of imagining ideals in respect of schooling, especially when attempting to liberate the marginalised, cannot, in my opinion, be ignored.

#### **6.4 Chapter Conclusion**

In the previous two chapters five themes which emerged from a photo elicitation, the writing of imaginative narratives, individual and group interviews were analysed. The first three themes addressed my first two research questions which focused on learners' experiences of social injustices as well as the question of how spaces of social injustice may influence learners' imaginations. Themes four and five responded to my second two research questions being those of how imaginings of success influence learner performance as well as why have these imaginings influenced performance in the way in which they have.

The insertion of some of the photos used during the photo elicitation process as well as extracts from learners' imaginative narratives were included to aid the reader in understanding the unique experiences and imaginings of each of the learners in my study. Presenting the pictures, extracts from imaginative narratives and spoken words from interviews in such an interwoven way, assisted me tremendously in analysing and presenting learners' experiences of social injustices, their imaginings of success as well as the influence such experiences and imaginings have on learners' academic performance without detracting from the interwoven nature of experience and imagining.

Ultimately, analysing and presenting the data in so interwoven a manner enabled me to theorise more deeply and in a more interconnected way the findings, than would otherwise have been the case. The influences that imaginings of success and experiences of social injustices have on learners academic performance was thus brought into quite clear a focus. In the next chapter I will theorise in greater detail some of the emergent findings which have been hinted at under many of the themes and sub-themes in this analysis chapter.

## Chapter Seven

### The Elliptic Theory of Imagination

#### 7.1 Introduction

Five themes emerged during my data analysis which evolved from a photo elicitation, imaginative narratives and individual as well as focus group semi-structured interviews. The data analysis spanned the length of my two previous chapters and several findings emerged. I will, however, focus on five findings which are pertinent to what I refer to as “the elliptic theory of imagination.” I have elected to take just one finding from each of my five themes. The number allocated to each finding corresponds with the theme number from which such finding was extracted in my previous two chapters.

The five findings are: 1) Learners are constantly exposed to low expectations and the doctoring of results (from theme 1), 2) Learners learn in environments of fear where their paths to success are often blocked (from theme 2), 3) Learners learn in spaces which represent unequal power relations (from theme 3), 4) Learners do have imaginings of success but they are influenced by exposure to social injustices in their school (from theme 4), and 5) Learners have the potential to transcend their circumstances through their imaginings of success (from theme 5). I will, at times in this chapter, refer to certain findings by their number. Extracts from the data will be placed in brackets and italicised simply to signal to the reader points at which I rely on data from my analysis chapter to help clarify arguments and claims.

In this chapter, using the five findings mentioned above, I elevated them and related each finding to the key constructs which exist in Deleuze’s (1994) theory on imagination, as well as key constructs in Freire’s (1996) theory concerning liberation of the oppressed. In doing this, as well as merging Deleuze’s (1994) theory with that of Freire (1996), I was able to

construct what I refer to as “the elliptic theory of imagination.” It is the elliptic theory of imagination which constitutes the theorising aspect of my study. It is this theory, how it emerged from data; relates to my findings and theoretical framework as well as how I constructed it, which I attempt to explain in great detail in this chapter.

## **7.2 Discussion of Findings of My Study**

The three phenomena on which my study focused were learners’ experiences of social injustices, learners’ experiences of poor performance as well as learners’ imaginings of success. I will highlight for the reader to which of these phenomena each of my selected five findings relate. Firstly, in respect of the phenomenon concerning learners’ experiences of social injustices the findings on which I would like to focus are those of learners experiencing a constant exposure to low expectations and the doctoring of results; as well as the finding that learners learn in spaces which represent unequal power relations. I would also like to focus on the finding that learners learn in environments of fear where their paths to success are often blocked. Learners in my study, learning in contexts of fear (*I was afraid and nervous, I was shaking*) and unequal power relations (*I felt so small and powerless in that place: that place gives power to some but not to others*) while being exposed to low expectations (*a lot of teachers seem to think that there is no hope for you anyway*) therefore find it difficult to divorce themselves from their material realities (present realities), and accordingly view this as a social injustice.

It is here, in the concern surrounding the divorcing of oneself from material realities, that once again I find myself reminded of the words of Pemba Tamang, the Nepal earthquake survivor. As one may recall I mentioned his words in chapter five (First Data Analysis Chapter); Tamang, just like the learners in my study found his possibilities as well as his imagining of possibilities of success to be somewhat limited by material realities to which he had been constantly exposed. This, of course, resonated with Deleuze’s (1994) assertion that imagination may be limited by exposure to material realities, thus justifying the need to move towards the dematerial in order to free one’s mind. Drohan (2010), in attempting to make

sense of Deleuze's (1994) work asserts that dematerial realities are synonymous with realities of one's future.

Concerning the phenomenon of learner poor performance, there was a relation to limitations exerted through material realities, as expressed in my discussion concerning the phenomenon described above. Some of my findings concerning the phenomenon of learner poor performance were that learners were exposed to an unequal distribution of power which tended to place limitations on their imaginations. Hence, both this phenomenon and the previous one make reference to limitations prevalent, to an extent, in learners' material realities as a result of unequal power relations. The finding that learners' paths to success were often blocked is also of relevance as the blocking of one's path often had some bearing on poor academic performance (*I failed a Technology test..... a fight blocked the way and made us all late for class.....if such a silly thing didn't happen we would have got there on time and got the right information for our test*).

Apart from the blocking of one's path to success, the learners in my study tended to relate poor performance to socioeconomic issues (*People are screaming and shouting right outside the school.... We should rather be building better fences and walls instead of wasting money on aircons*). They often asserted that the environments in which they were expected to learn were non-conducive to the attainment of academic success (*The learning environment must change..... change to one where you will want to work harder and do well*). Some learners went as far as describing school as an unwelcoming space. Thus, learning context emerged as a point of relevance when discussing the phenomenon of learner performance.

It is in this instance of learning context that I contend that the works of Deleuze (1994) and Freire (1996) may merge. My finding that learners learn in an environment of fear is of relevance here as reference to "structures" is made by Freire (1996), while Deleuze (1994) refers to "context." In my study I consider both structures and contexts to refer to the environments of learning to which the participants in my study are exposed which may include, but is not limited to physical spaces such as buildings and classrooms as well as policies and governance of physical spaces. This is because Choi and Hannafin (1995)



contend that both structures and contexts of learning contain within their definitions references to physical surrounds as well as human surrounds and rules or policy. Freire (1996) makes the postulation that structures, which I will take to also refer to one's context, requires transformation otherwise the oppressed remain beings for others. Whereas Deleuze (1994) has made the assertion that a separating of one from one's existing context, which is essentially one's material reality, is necessitated if one's mind is to be freed of limitations inherent in such material reality. Thus, both Deleuze (1994) and Freire (1996) seem to support a movement towards a new and transformed structure/context or reality in order to remove limitations which hinder, in the instance of my study, the attainment of academic success.

The final phenomenon to which my key findings relate was that of learner imagination, with specific reference to learners' imaginings of success. Here the findings in my study which were of relevance were findings that learners do have imaginings of success in their schooling, and learners have the potential to transcend their circumstances through their imaginings of success. However, what became evident upon analysing the data was that learners, in their imaginings, had to move beyond what to them, was known, towards what may have been unknown, otherwise their imaginings became limited by past experiences. In essence, they relied heavily on imagination to make this movement from the known to the unknown. Had they not made this movement, limitations placed on them by their material realities would likely have prevailed. (*with so few people motivating you, failing is accepted as your fate*). It is therefore evident that common across my findings related to each of the three phenomena is that limitations placed on learners through existing in their realities had to be transcended. However, in this instance, imagination was used to evoke such transcendence.

The manner in which imagination was used by the learners in my study was as a sort of vehicle which moved learners thinking around ideas of success and the possible attainment thereof from a state of limitation towards one of freedom of imagination. Thus, imagination, through the merging of Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination and Freire's (1996) theory concerning liberation, as expressed in my theoretical framework chapter, could and did indeed, in my study operate as a vehicle for liberation. This notion of imagination operating

as a vehicle for liberation makes possible my elliptic theory of imagination. I intend to explain this theory in greater detail below. However, in order to do this, some of the key constructs in Deleuze's (1994) theory and Freire's (1996) theory require some explanation, on which I focus under my next heading.

### **7.3 Deleuze and Freire's Key Constructs**

Freire's (1996) theory with a specific focus on education embeds themes and constructs of oppression and liberation while his critical pedagogy is geared towards bringing about social transformation. Deleuze (1994) however, focuses on imagination arguing that the role of imagination is one of merging what ordinarily may not be merged. Findings one through three are related directly to Freire's (1996) theory in that they each allude to contexts of social injustice. These findings thus highlight the need for a sort of change in respect of context if social justice is to be promoted. Findings four and five are related to Deleuze's (1994) theory as they each relate directly to imagination and its bearing on knowledge acquisition.

As far as knowledge acquisition is concerned, Deleuze (1994) suggests a movement of one's understandings and thinking, aided by imagination, from the living present, merging with the past, in a backward sort of motion. Deleuze (1994) then argues that from that point one's understandings and thinking are transported to the future in a forward motion. Deleuze (1994) argues that this movement helps in the acquisition of knowledge that may otherwise have been unknown.

Rastovic (2011) who, like many authors attempts to make sense of Deleuze's rather complex work, argues that to understand Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination and its associated merging characteristics one must bear in mind the fact that very important to Deleuze was understanding the constantly changing structure of reality. The learners in my study were exposed to constantly changing realities, although at times changes were merely imagined

*(the school will change my mindset, there is a huge change in what is expected of you once you get to high school, the environment must change if I am to be successful).*

Rastovic (2011) highlighted that Deleuze (1994) was of the contention that a back and forth movement is displayed in imagination as one's imagination may move understandings of reality from a material reality, which is what already exists (the present), merging with the immaterial (the past) and transporting understandings to the dematerial (the future). Learners in my study were indeed faced with having to change their mindsets concerning what was expected of them once they entered high school. They had to change to fit the school (*This school will change your mindset*), but very importantly they imagined change concerning their environments of learning so as to attain academic success (*I imagine a school without violence; I imagine a school in which more people care*). I will now, under the following headings, focus on specific constructs of Deleuze and Freire which relate directly to my findings and the elliptic theory of imagination.

### **7.3.1 Constructs of Dematerial, Material, Immaterial, Liberation and Structural Transformation**

Movement towards the dematerial reality, which in essence could be viewed as a transformed structure becomes dependent on the merging of the material and immaterial realities as explained by Rastovic (2011) above. Nevertheless, movement both back and forth remains possible through the use of imagination which begins to act as a sort of vehicle for this movement; as Deleuze (1994) contends that imagination assists in moving one's understandings from the known material reality to the unknown dematerial reality. Related to such contention is my finding that learners do indeed imagine success, albeit influenced by experiences of social injustices (*I imagine performing well despite not being encouraged; I imagine not having to fight to keep my fire burning and being very successful*).

Another of my findings related to movement of understandings from the immaterial and material realities towards dematerial realities was that learners can transcend their

circumstances through the imagining of success (*I imagine a school in which you want to succeed; I imagine being taught how to achieve my goals*). However, one should not ignore the fact that while Freire (1996) argues for structural transformation, Deleuze (1994) speaks of transforming structures of reality by use of imagination. Thus it should also be noted that despite the imaginings of success expressed by the learners in my study, in order for them to obtain such success changes in their material realities were required (*The environment must change before my fire dies..... individuality must be respected..... in such a school I could most definitely perform well*). A free movement of imagination, in essence a back and forth movement of imagination, as expressed by Deleuze (1994) is therefore necessitated. This free movement of imagination then enables the eventual transformation of structures, as called for by Freire (1996) so as to assist in liberating learners from their otherwise oppressive material realities.

The environments in which learners were expected to learn were riddled with low expectations, in accordance with one of my findings (*So many teachers and even other learners think that we won't amount to much*). In addition, another finding suggests that learners had to learn in environments of fear (*I was afraid at the same time that we may blow up; I was very afraid that someone may steal my drawing board*). While yet another of my findings was that learners were exposed to an unequal distribution of power (*The podium does equal power... it gives some power; Passage going down to the office..... I felt so small and powerless in that space*).

Common amongst the three findings above were that learners were having to learn in environments that were socially unjust. Drawing once again from Deleuze's (1994) assertion that imagination may be influenced by one's past (immaterial) reality and one's present (material) reality it becomes apparent that there is a relation to finding number four. Finding four suggests that learners can imagine success, but their imaginings are influenced by their realities. Therefore, if learners' imaginings remain too closely linked to, and influenced by their realities their imaginings become limited by experiences. In this case, past and present experiences of social injustices appeared to limit the imaginings of learners.

Based on my discussion thus far, I feel justified in arguing that imagination can indeed be used as a vehicle for liberation. However, it may only effect change beyond the minds of marginalised learners when the theories of both Freire (1996) and Deleuze (1994) are, in a Deleuzean style of thinking, merged. I make this argument because Deleuze’s (1994) theory on imagination according to Rastovic (2011) focuses on the construction of realities in one’s mind. So learners then, in accordance with findings four and five (Imagination is influenced by exposure to social injustices and learners transcend circumstances through imagining success) may imagine realities of success. Freire’s (1996) theory, however, makes specific reference to structural transformation, thus going beyond mere realities constructed in one’s mind and so being able to transcend the circumstances highlighted in findings one, two and three becomes possible. To clarify this movement of imagination and its relationship to structural transformation, I have assembled the figure below which I will later adapt to help explain my elliptic theory of imagination.

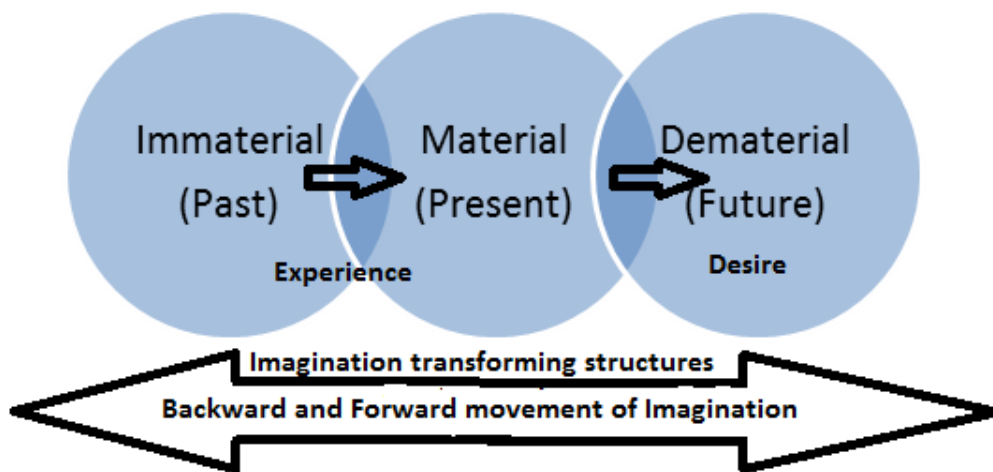


Figure 7.1

Evidenced in the discussion and the figure above is the fact that one’s reality or the structures of one’s reality may indeed be transformed through the use of imagination. Where one’s reality, be it present reality (material) becomes merged with past reality (immaterial) and both are riddled with instances of oppression and social injustice, imagination may be used to transcend these circumstances (*Most of these people don’t value education..... So I imagine a school without people like that.... I would perform well in such a school*). However, keeping in mind the assertion of Rastovic (2011) that realities are constructed in the mind

when relying on Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination, the merging of Deleuze's (1994) with Freire's (1996) theory is necessitated.

The backward and forward movement of imagination, as seen above makes it possible for one's past to merge with one's present. Merging past and present realities Deleuze (1994) argues makes it possible for a desire to be awakened in one to transcend the limitations of past and present experiences. In the instance of the learners in my study past and present experiences of oppression apply. Essentially, learners used imagination to move or transport their thinking and understandings towards a future in which liberation is indeed possible, even if this future remains imagined. Learners in my study imagined future realities in which they were liberated to the extent that they were no longer restrained by limitations inherent in their past and present realities (*I imagine myself being taught how to achieve my goals; I imagine being able to find solutions to every problem I have ever had*).

For the learners in my study, imagination became a vehicle capable of moving thinking and understandings not just back and forth across realities but towards realities in which liberation does indeed exist. Such can be demonstrated through the finding that learners, despite past experiences imagined success and futures free from social injustices (*I imagine myself being successful through being in the right place to study; I imagine a school without violence; I imagine performing well*).

The "right place to study" based on the data would likely be one free from what the learners in my study deemed to be instances of social injustices as they claimed that having to learn in environments non-conducive to studying was a social injustice. As the learners in my study began to imagine these future realities, free from social injustices, imaginings of liberated realities did indeed emerge. But, these imaginings had to remain sufficiently distanced from experiences, otherwise they may have been limited by experience (*I really feel that this kind of attitude of everybody wanting to play instead of work gets in the way of my success.....I imagine a school where we are not forced to follow the crowd*)

### **7.3.2 Constructs of: Borders of Knowledge, Merging Realities, Critical Thinking and Substantive Equality**

Operating at the border which separates what is known through experience from what is unknown but may be imagined is one of many key constructs in Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination. Deleuze (1994) argues that society constructs its own disordered state of mind through recording in memory what may have already happened. In the instances of the learners in my study they did record in their memories what had already happened to them (*I remember my first day of school like it was yesterday..... the signs in the carpark were turned upside down.....I too felt very unwelcomed on my first day*). What has already happened to the learners who participated in my study can be expressed in accordance with findings one through three in that they have been exposed to low expectations (*Teachers tell us we're going to fail*), unequal distributions of power (*The podium gives power to some.... I felt so small and powerless in that space*), and have had to learn in environments of fear (*I was afraid that someone may steal my drawing board*).

When drawing a bridge between theories of Freire (1996) and Deleuze (1994), I noted in my literature review that Deleuze's (1994) assertion that repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but rather changes something in the mind which contemplates it, serves to, to some degree, support Freire's (1996) argument that through repetition, indoctrination is often in operation. The learners in my study have been repeatedly exposed to instances of low expectations, unequal power relations and having to learn in environments of fear, as described above. Thus, following Deleuze's (1994) and Freire's (1996) assertions, through repetition, the minds of the learners in my study were likely changed and indoctrination was likely in operation to the extent that they simply accept their circumstances of injustices (*Doing badly is a fashion trend..... my family has advised me to blend in to stay out of trouble; I don't feel very motivated..... I don't even feel like studying*).

From the above, it is thus apparent that repetition of experience; coupled with memories of experiences, possibly experiences of social injustices, only serve to create a body of knowledge which remains separated by a border from what has neither been experienced nor

remembered. Accordingly, at times it was difficult for learners to imagine solutions to their problems and ways forward (*I feel as though there will never be any solutions to my problems..... I can't think of any*).

The learners in my study thus repeatedly experienced social injustices and memories of such which formed a body of knowledge separated by a border from the reality they eventually imagined. Deleuze (1994) proffers that in order to traverse such a border one must, through the use of imagination, operate at the border for however long it takes for what is known to eventually merge with what is unknown, in other words what is an imagined reality. The writing of imaginative narratives, as explained in my methodology chapter, served to evoke such an occurrence in respect of the learners who participated in my study.

Social injustice was certainly prevalent within the realities in which the learners in my study found themselves having to learn. However, social justice, according to Bell (1997), as mentioned in my literature review, is a process. But Deleuze (1994) has contended that the aim of any process is not to perpetuate the process itself, but rather to achieve some sort of completion. Thus, using Deleuze's (1994) claims concerning operating at the border between what is known and what is unknown one can argue that that, in itself, may very well be a process whose completion lies in traversing such border to begin to operate with what is unknown, albeit, an imagined reality free from oppression.

In the instance of my study, what the learners eventually imagined, was indeed an imagined reality free from the constraints and limitations exerted on them through repeated experiences of social injustices (*I imagine myself performing well..... despite these surroundings you will do well even if no-one expects it, because you want it*). However, getting to this imagined reality despite their material realities required the merging of a known (past and present) with an unknown (future). Alternatively stated, a merging of an immaterial and material reality with a dematerial reality was required. Finding four (learners' abilities to imagine success) thus remained possible, despite the existence of findings one through three which relate to circumstances of social injustices. The learners in my study were therefore



able to imagine success despite having been exposed to repeated instances of social injustices (*despite these surroundings you will do well even if no-one expects it, because you want it*).

Nevertheless, for this dematerial future to become a material present, Freire's (1996) construct of critical thinking was required. This is because Gynther (2009) postulates that critical thinking makes possible the acceptance of the notion of substantive equality being preferred over formal equality. This is evidenced in the data which emerged in my study (*Yes, we can only achieve success if those of us who have been so disadvantaged are provided with more assistance than those who are already on top*). Indeed Freire's (1996) call for the promotion of critical thinking was necessitated in my study as the learners may not have made claims which alluded to the need for substantive equality (which will be discussed in the next paragraph) were they not critical thinkers. Instead, as Welsh (2014) has claimed youths who lack a critical consciousness tend to accept the status quo despite how oppressive it may be, and that may very well have been the case with the participants in my study. As shown above, in order to assist in moving from a reality that perhaps was devoid of such thinking imagination was required. Thus, Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination, linked directly to findings four and five, which deal with learners' abilities to imagine success and so transcend circumstances, was highly necessary in my study.

As regards the construct of substantive equality as opposed to formal equality, Gynther (2009) draws a distinction between the two. Gynther (2009) asserts that formal equality involves a mere equal application of rules; in other words, it operates as a blanket sort of equality in which all people are treated exactly the same. While the latter, substantive equality, Gynther (2009) asserts, focuses more on disadvantage, holding that the greater the disadvantage to which an individual or group has been subjected, the greater the support such individual or group should receive. This notion is clearly shown in the illustration which follows:

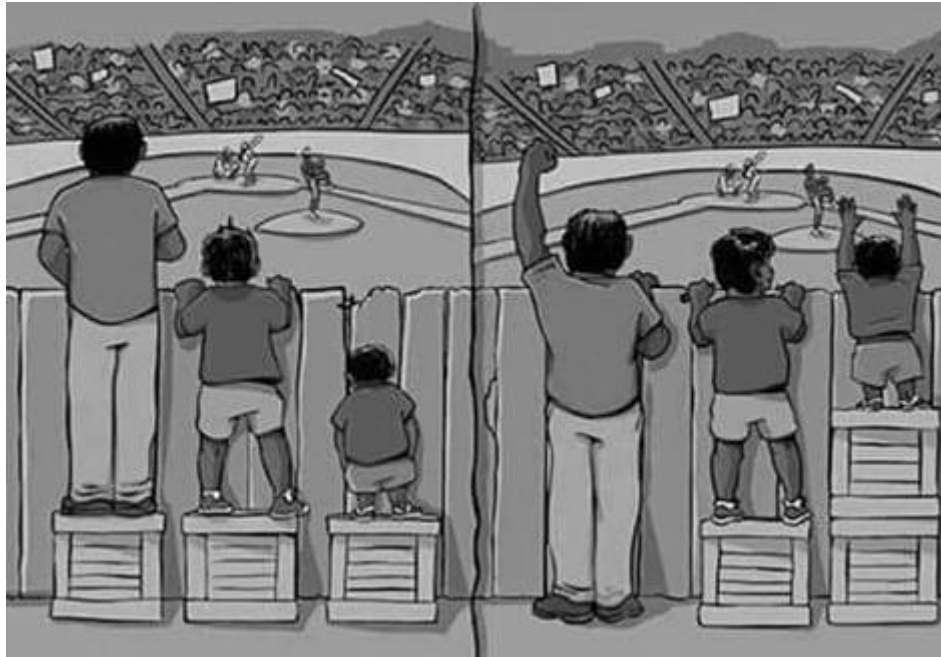


Figure 7.2

In the illustration above, it is apparent that unlike the instance of formal equality, in the instance of substantive equality an unequal application of rules is often necessitated in order to achieve equality. The image on the left shows how formal equality would only serve to perpetuate inequality while the one on the right shows how substantive equality is more likely to achieve equality. It thus becomes apparent, that when taking into consideration the different degrees of disadvantage to which the learners in my study have been subjected (*I do receive help from my family as they create an atmosphere for learning; My aunt encourages me to work harder; I sometimes ask my mother for help, but only in subjects I know she will be able to help with. When it comes to Maths and Science just forget it*) to merely rely on formal equality, would have been insufficient.

I am thus inclined to argue that the learners in my study are very justified in being concerned about their contention that diversity, in their school, is inadequately catered for (*What I don't like is that the work they do there is often not the same as where you are in class..... to me it's like the relation is not there; Extra lessons last the whole day on weekends and after that you are too tired to do school homework or study*). Relying more on substantive equality would therefore appear somewhat more desirable when attempting to liberate marginalised learners,

who have experienced differing degrees of inequality, so as to enable them to transcend the barriers which separates their immaterial and material reality from their dematerial reality. Nevertheless, as expressed numerous times above, in my study, I rely on imagination to act as the vehicle which transports one's thinking from the trappings and limitations of their immaterial and material reality towards a liberated dematerial reality.

Just as the learners in my study experienced differing degrees of inequality (*I know nobody will help me because in the past nobody has; My mother will help me, I sometimes ask my mother for help but only with subjects I know she will be able to help with*) and oppression (*Society puts coloureds in a box as being good for nothing but drinking; I imagine myself being a successful engineer who will prove that women can do just as well as men and maybe even better*); so too did their imaginings in relation to the trappings and limitations of their immaterial and material realities differ (*My class teacher actually tells us we're going to fail..... they have just accepted it as their fate; I will likely play sick again..... there is no point in being at school..... most people don't pay attention anyway*).

It is concerning these differing relations of learners' imaginings to their immaterial and material realities that the notion of "elliptic" becomes of relevance. This is because "elliptic" implies an oval-like shape, suggesting that various points along the shape are at varying distances from the centre. Therefore various points have differing relations with the centre itself (Strahler & Strahler, 2006). I have used this notion of "elliptic" to assist me in constructing my elliptic theory on imagination. A brief explanation of this notion follows.

#### **7.4 The Notion of "Elliptic"**

Throughout this chapter I have made mention of what I have referred to as "the elliptic theory of imagination." I would thus be remiss were I not to dedicate a brief space in this chapter which explains, rather simply the notion of "elliptic." After doing this, I feel I will be in a position to adequately attempt to explain the elliptic theory of imagination itself and how it relates to, and emerged from my study.

The word “elliptic” or “elliptical” is generally used to describe the Earth’s orbital motion in relation to the sun (Strahler & Strahler, 2006). In essence “elliptic” describes the pattern the Earth follows when moving around the sun. In the figure below it is evident that the pattern to which I refer is not circular, as is often assumed, but rather more oval in nature. An implication inherent in that pattern of movement is that at times the Earth may be close to the sun, while at others it may be somewhat further away from the sun. The term “perihelion” describes the point at which the Earth is nearest to the sun along its orbit, while the term “aphelion” describes the point at which the Earth is furthest from the sun along its orbit (Strahler & Strahler, 2006).

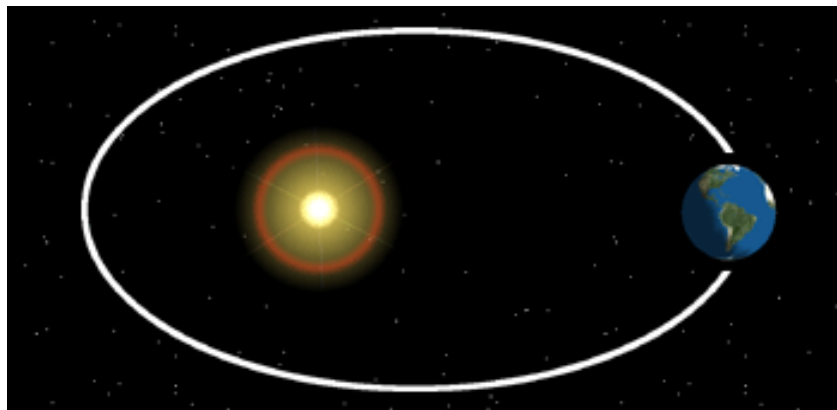


Figure 7.3: The Elliptic movement of the Earth as it orbits the sun

Solar radiation emitted by the sun contains ultra-violet radiation which, when received in large quantities, has detrimental effects for life on Earth. Not only is too much ultra-violet radiation associated with skin cancers in humans but the process of photosynthesis in plants is also adversely affected, which ultimately has detrimental effects on Earth’s food-chain (Pesnell, 2015). Nevertheless, receiving too little solar radiation, and therefore too little ultra-violet radiation also has negative effects for life on Earth. In respect of humans, a lack of vitamin D, the production of which is triggered by ultra-violet radiation, affects the body’s ability to adequately absorb calcium which places people at risk of bone fractures and surprisingly increases the risk of cancers. Too little ultra-violet radiation received by plants prevents the occurrence of photosynthesis in its entirety, thereby once again adversely affecting Earth’s food-chain (Pesnell, 2015).

In the paragraph above, it becomes apparent that in respect of the Earth and its distance from the sun, one is faced with a double-edged sword. Such can be evidenced when combining the discussion of Pesnell (2015) above, with the diagram below (figure 7.4) which depicts the Earth's elliptic movement around the sun. One can thus conclude that being too close to the sun is detrimental to life on Earth, while being too far from the sun may too be detrimental to Earth's life. Accordingly, a balance must be struck, and it has therefore been argued that the Earth receives optimum levels of solar radiation when it exists at points along its elliptic orbit around the sun which place it neither too close to, nor too far from the sun. In essence such points exist neither at the perihelion nor at the aphelion, but rather between lines XY and WC as illustrated in the diagram below.

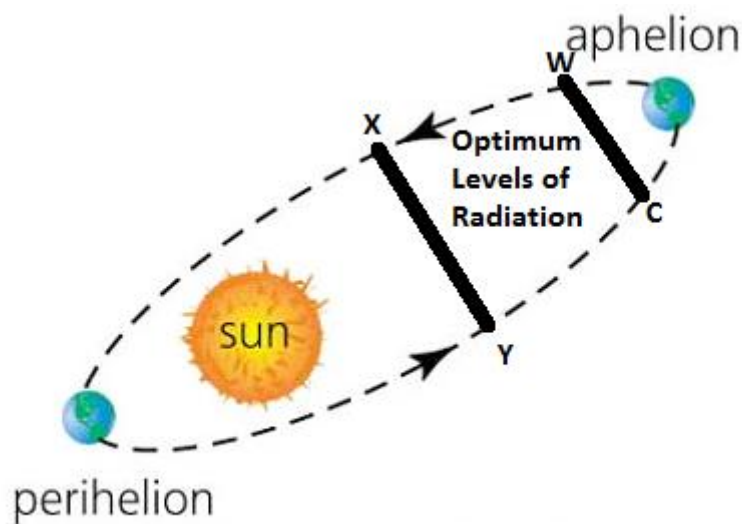


Figure 7.4

## 7.5 The Elliptic Theory of Imagination

Under the prior heading the notion of “Elliptic” was explained. The Earth’s receiving of optimum levels of solar radiation was shown to be dependent on the points at which the Earth exists along its elliptic orbit around the sun. I thus feel, at this juncture, that a sufficient basis for my presenting of the elliptic theory of imagination has been established. Just as the sun remained a constant for the Earth as the Earth followed its elliptic orbit around the sun, as the sun fed radiation to the Earth; the realities of the learners in my study remained a constant as their imaginings, in some way, orbited these realities. As learners’ imaginings orbited their realities, these imaginings were fed, not radiation, but influence from their realities (*What’s happening around me really does influence the way I perform; To imagine success we need more things to happen that motivate us to want to do stuff instead of everything just being a waste of time.*)

The learners in my study, despite a constant and repeated exposure to social injustices which existed in both their past (immaterial realities) and present (material realities) were able to imagine success (*I imagine myself being very successful despite people around us trying to bring us down*). The imagining of success, despite one’s immaterial and material realities was made possible through the construction of what Deleuze (1994) refers to as a dematerial reality. It was therefore in the midst of one’s dematerial reality that learners were able to imagine what otherwise may not have seemed possible when faced solely with their immaterial and material realities which were largely riddled with social injustices.

Reality, as mentioned above, was a constant when learners imagined as their imaginings were at all times shaped to some degree by their realities. At times learners’ imaginings were limited by reality while at others they got carried away, with imaginings becoming somewhat unrealistic. Nevertheless, I was able to observe a stark similarity between the Earth’s orbit around the sun, which is its constant, and the orbit of learners’ imaginations around their realities, and more specifically, an orbit around their material realities. It was the observance of this similarity that resulted in my discovery of what I have decided to call the elliptic theory of imagination.

In the elliptic theory of imagination I have taken the liberty of likening material realities of learners to the sun, whilst learners' imaginings have been likened to the Earth. Naturally then, in the elliptic theory of imagination learners' imaginings orbit their material realities in much the same fashion as the Earth orbits the sun. That is to say, imaginings follow an elliptical pattern around material realities. Thus, at times learners' imaginings were found to be rather close to their material realities, while at other times learners' imaginings were found to be quite far removed from their material realities.

Just as the Earth's being either too close to, or too far from, the sun was found to yield a dire end result, a similar occurrence was evident in the elliptic theory of imagination. In this theory, if one's imagining was found to be too close to one's material reality as well as if one's imagining was found to be too far from one's material reality, the end result was dire. In essence, if one's imagining existed too close to one's material reality, the oftentimes associated limitations and social injustices of one's material reality limited one's imagining to the extent that limitations concerning one's future prospects of success were evident. As mentioned previously, a good example of where this occurred was in the case of Pemba Tamang, the Nepal earthquake survivor. Tamang had been constantly exposed to a material reality devoid of what many may consider success. Thus, when asked where he imagined himself in the future he enthusiastically asserted that he would like to become a taxi driver. His imagining, when viewed in light of the elliptic theory of imagination, orbited too close to his material reality. However, if one's imagining was too far removed from one's material reality, imaginings seemed to become somewhat unrealistic (*I imagine a school where people with such a poor attitude just stay at home*), an occurrence against which Deleuze (1994) strongly advises when he calls for a realistic imagination.

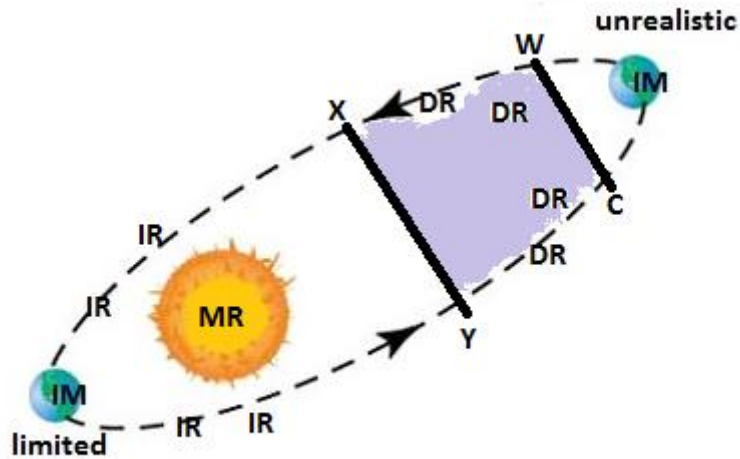


Figure 7.5

**MR – Material Reality**  
**IM – Imagination**  
**IR- Immaterial Reality**  
**DR – Dematerial Reality**

In the diagram above the Earth has been replaced with one's imagination, while the sun has been replaced with one's material reality. The words "limited" and "unrealistic" have been used to replace the words "perihelion" and "aphelion" respectively. "Limited" thus represents the closest orbital point of one's imagination to material reality, signifying a limited imagination. While, "unrealistic" represents the furthest orbital point of one's imagination from material reality, signifying an unrealistic imagining at such a point. The area shaded in lavender, filled with "DR" and demarcated to exist between lines XY and WC represents points which promote a balanced receipt of influence from one's material reality. As such, it is in this area (the lavender zone) that imagination is able to operate as a vehicle for liberation.

Imagination operates as a vehicle for liberation in the lavender zone (between lines XY and WC) because in this area it is neither limited by material realities (*So if people who are top of the class are battling imagine how much worse it is for those who were just pushed up- Brittany*) through being too close to them, nor is it unrealistic (*I imagine a school with no litter..... I imagine receiving much encouragement..... even from teachers- Brittany*) through being too far removed from material realities. I consider the imagining of a school with no litter and one in which much encouragement is received from teachers to be



unrealistic in the case of Brittany because the data collected suggests enormous amounts of litter and very little encouragement from teachers to be commonplace. However, Brittany's imagining, I would argue, existed in the lavender zone towards the end of her interview (*So, I need to find a balance in order to be academically successful, or at least I need to avoid being around people who are not interested in working- Brittany*) as realising, and even imagining herself finding a balance in which she takes the initiative to avoid being around individuals who are not interested in working, while still socialising with friends who motivate her is certainly achievable, and thus a realistic imagining.

### **7.5.1 Using Freire and Deleuze to Develop an Elliptic Theory**

Freire (1996) has written about structural transformation to aid liberation of the oppressed, while Deleuze (1994) has focused on imagination and how it may be used to free one's mind from limitations inherent in one's material reality. I have maintained in my study that the merging of these two theories have, to an extent, made it possible, not only for imagination to act as a vehicle for liberation, but also for me to develop the elliptic theory of imagination. It is the merging of these two theories which I explain under this heading. Also, as promised previously, under this heading I present an adaptation of a previous diagram showing imaginations' movement from past through present to future (acting as a vehicle for liberation) placed directly under the diagram showing the elliptic theory of imagination so as to visually highlight the significance of merging the work of Freire (1996) with that of Deleuze (1994) to help develop my theory.

Deleuze (1994) uses imagination to merge what is known through experience, and what one may not know, having never experienced it. However, it is Freire (1996) who suggested structural transformation so as to accommodate the marginalised in society, rather than having them merely exist as beings who serve the interests of their oppressors. On the point of structural transformation, in respect of applying that notion to my study, I could not help but wonder "transformation from what; and to what?" Perhaps imagining a structure that may be conducive to the success of the marginalised could constitute the "to what" as Deleuze (1994) contends that imagining may pave the way forward to eventually make an

imagining a reality. Accordingly, the question of “transformation to what?” now becomes answered with whatever the imagined conditions or structure is to pave the way to success. Thus, an idea that may initially be rejected because it has never been experienced could, very well become a reality if one simply begins to imagine it. Imagining a reality in which the learners in my study are no longer, as Freire (1996) may describe the oppressed, the pathology of a healthy society which must adjust to fit within the healthy society is what emerged when learners began to share their imaginings (*I imagine a more inviting school*).

Drohan (2010) when attempting to understand the work of Deleuze arrived at the conclusion that when applying Deleuze’s (1994) theory of imagination to one’s reality, all that is required to transform said reality is imagination acting as an aid in paving the way towards an imagined reality. However, Freire (1996) contends that being excluded from the construction of one’s own reality is not only contrary to being human but also frustrating, and this frustration therefore spurs a desire within the oppressed to rebel against the very structures which hold them captive to oppression. When the oppressed begin to engage in constructing their own realities a process of humanization begins (Freire, 1996). Humanization for Freire requires the understanding that reality ought to be inclusive of all, and as such I would go as far as arguing that the construction of realities too, ought to involve the inclusion of all.

In the instance of my study the oppressed and marginalised learners who were willing to imagine a way forward, possibly through structural transformation, when imagining (in accordance with Deleuze’s (1994) theory), a transformed structure (in accordance with Freire’s (1996) theory), found themselves arriving at an end result of transcendence of limitations inherent in one’s everyday experiences (*I imagine performing well, and not being distracted by temptations; I imagine not having to fight to keep my fire burning*). Undoubtedly, then, the marginalised and oppressed in my study, through engaging in the imagining of their desired realities have embarked on a journey of humanization and indeed one that would ultimately lead to liberation. However, such liberation in their case did not occur without the use of imagination which began to open their minds to possibilities of success despite experiences of oppression and injustices.

Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination puts forward the notion that through imagination, one may operate at the border which separates in one's mind, what is known from what is unknown. According to Deleuze (1994) operating at this border for long enough causes the line between the known and the unknown to blur and so eventually the unknown becomes the known. This blurring happens as one's mind is then freed of, as Vinz (1997) proffers, deeply embedded understandings which have been embedded through experience. The possibility to move freely between two opposites and perhaps even merge these two, which ordinarily may not have been merged, is accordingly evoked through the use of imagination (Deleuze, 1994). The learners in my study, through the use of imagination, were able to operate at the border between what, to them was known through experience, in essence, social injustices and oppression (*Everyone is just failing and no-one seems to care; My class teacher actually tells us we're going to fail*), and what was unknown through having never experienced it, a reality conducive to the attainment of academic success (*I imagine a school in which all illegal substances never see the light of day; I imagine myself receiving much encouragement from family, friends and even teachers*).

This idea of moving between opposites from understandings of limitations and social injustices towards a transformed structure free from such limitations ought to be achievable in one's mind when Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination is evoked. This is because, as mentioned previously, Deleuze (1994) has asserted that the changing of one's reality begins with the mere imagining of a future reality. Linking Deleuze's (1994) work to that of Freire (1996) the imagining of transformed structures, free from social injustices is not too far a stretch. This is because using Deleuze's (1994) and Freire's (1996) work to complement each other, instead of merely imagining a future reality as Deleuze (1994) proposes, one may begin to imagine a future reality with some degree of specificity, and the specificity of relevance in my study is that of structural transformation such that social injustices no longer abound. Thus, one may essentially imagine a future reality free from social injustices.

If imagining remains the starting point in achieving an imagined reality, as argued by Deleuze (1994) it seems logical then that through beginning to imagine Freire's (1996) structural transformation, a structure which is free from social injustices, should very well become a reality. In essence, structural transformation (transforming structures of existence

to ones in which the oppressed are no longer merely beings for others (Freire, 1996) but rather critically conscious individuals), so as to promote social justice will be achieved, even though the starting point for this achievement was mere imagination.

The “dematerial,” to which Deleuze (1994) refers was represented in my study by learners’ imaginings of future realities (*I imagine working harder and performing well*). Thus, a steady movement away from the concrete “materialism” of learner poor performance and social injustice was facilitated through imagination. This process then enabled me, in my study, to fathom from learners’ imaginations, an idea of a structure which is conducive to success in respect of learner academic performance. From the fathoming of this structure, I found myself in a better position to understand how one may start working towards making this imagined structure a reality. This entire process although dependent on the work of Deleuze (1994) was undeniably in line with Freire’s (1996) notion of structural transformation as it aided the liberation of the oppressed and marginalised. Thus, using both Freire’s (1996) theory as well as Deleuze’s (1994) theory in a complimentary manner, as described above, was needed to ultimately pave the way towards liberating learners who had become very accustomed to experiencing social injustices.

In essence, the transforming of structures in accordance with Freire’s (1996) theory, is, in my study, made possible by first beginning to imagine, in accordance with Deleuze’s (1994) theory, a transformed structure despite one’s material reality. Thus, the learners in my study were able to imagine a reality in which they were no longer petrified (*This fear of blowing up plays on my mind; I was afraid and nervous, I was shaking; I was so afraid that they were going to tell*) which was necessary for liberation as Freire (1996) has contended that keeping the oppressed in a petrified state only serves the interests of the oppressors. Being petrified Freire (1996) argues, prevents one from being confident enough to engage in critical thinking. Using these two theories in so complimentary a manner, not only enabled the development of the elliptic theory of imagination, but also makes explaining the traversing of such theory somewhat easier to understand. This will become evident when I focus on one learner’s traversing of this elliptic theory under my next heading.

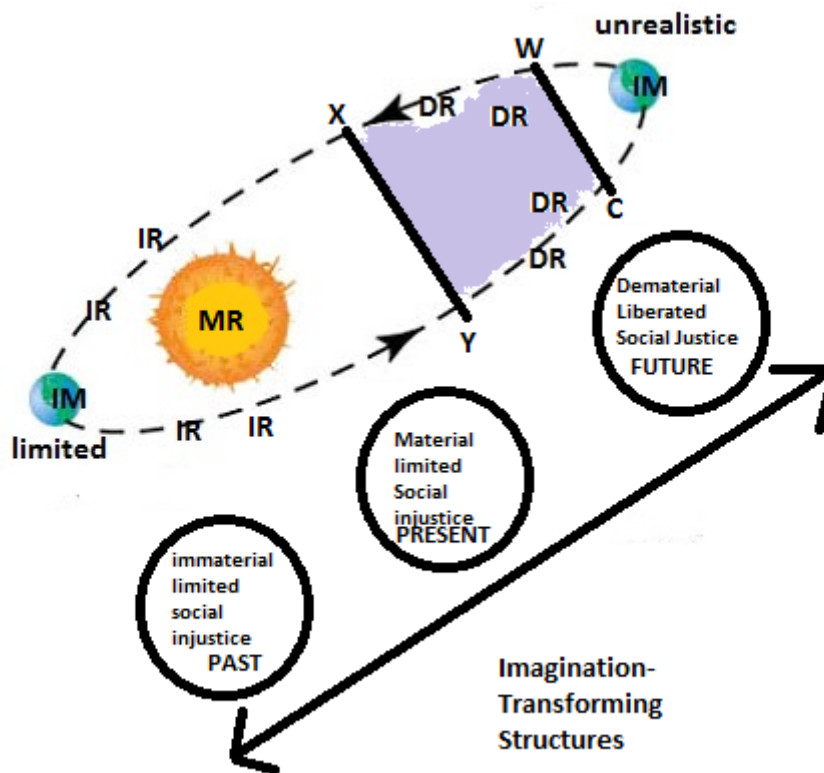


Figure 7.6

In the diagram above, following the three circles in relation to the elliptic orbit above them, it is hoped that one is able to gain a visual perspective on just how imagination, when operating as a vehicle for liberation transports one through realities (Deleuze) while transforming structures (Freire). Imagination, according to Deleuze (1994) has the ability to move back and forth, thus linking past, present and future structures and realities. However, following Freire's (1996) theory of structural transformation and relying on the data in my study, it became apparent that structures which existed in learners' pasts and present were riddled with social injustices and limitations concerning success (*What's happening around me really does influence the way I perform...., when everyone around me is having fun, then I just want to join in and go all out; when everyone is just failing, failing seems the norm*).

Thus, in the elliptic theory of imagination I put forward the notion that imagination does indeed operate as a vehicle for liberation by moving one, or at least one's thinking, away from the limitations and social injustices associated with the past (immaterial reality) and

present (material reality) towards a future (dematerial reality) free from social injustice and limitations. However, in order for one to effectively imagine a future of success and ways of obtaining it, thus helping one pave a way towards achieving it, imagination must exist in the lavender zone. The lavender zone is demarcated such that it exists between lines XY and WC in the diagram above. It is in this zone that imagination, when following an elliptical orbit around material reality, is neither limited by being too close to a material reality nor too far from a material reality, which would ultimately render one's imagining unrealistic.

### **7.5.2 Explaining the Elliptic Theory of Imagination**

The elliptic theory of imagination can be explained in the following way: Imagination does indeed operate as a vehicle for liberation by assisting the oppressed learners in my study to imagine a future reality with social structures free from social injustices. In such a structure the attainment of success, and for the purposes of my study, academic success, are very much possible for the oppressed learners. However, the imaginations of the learners in my study were found to move not only back and forth (from past to present to future and vice versa) as purported by Deleuze (1994) but also in an elliptical fashion as learners' imaginings orbited their material realities.

For instance Toby, in the initial interview found it somewhat difficult to imagine being academically successful through receiving the requisite help to aid his attainment of success (*I know nobody will help me because in the past people haven't been very helpful, they feel as though they are wasting their time with me.*). At this stage, following the elliptic theory of imagination I would argue that his imagination orbited too closely to his material reality (at the perihelion) and was thus limited by this reality. However, later when writing his imaginative narrative, Toby began to imagine unrealistically (*I imagine myself owning a flying car so I can fly over the houses of those who doubted me and drop poop bombs on them.*). At this stage Toby's imagination had drifted too far from his material reality (at the aphelion) and therefore his imagining became unrealistic. Deleuze (1994) cautions one against imagining unrealistically, claiming that such imaginings may never become a reality, thus negating the need to blur the lines between what is known and what is unknown in order

to merge the two. An imagining which exists in what I call, “the lavender zone” was required if Toby’s imaginings were to pave his way towards the attainment of success. Eventually, at the final focus group interview, Toby began to not only imagine more realistically (*I imagine a school where learners follow school rules*), but view his circumstances in a more realistic fashion (*If you want to do well academically, you simply do it for yourself*). At this point Toby’s imaginings and even thinking around matters of schooling and the attainment of academic success were neither too close to his material reality, nor too far removed from his material reality. Thus, Toby’s imagining followed an elliptical movement around his material reality, starting off too close, then moving too far away, and finally arriving in the lavender zone where his imaginings were such that they would indeed aid him, realistically in the attainment of academic success in a near future reality.

In summation of my observations concerning Toby’s imaginings, as well as others one could say that where learners’ imaginings were very close to their material realities, in other words at the perihelion, they were found to be limited by the limitations and social injustices which prevailed in learners’ past (immaterial) and present (material) realities. Thus, my diagrams placed the immaterial realities in close proximity to the perihelion where limiting influences of the material realities, as well as the immaterial realities, existed. Nevertheless, where learners’ imaginings were very far from their material realities (at the aphelion), these imaginings became somewhat unrealistic, and as Deleuze (1994) warns, became pointless in the merging of two opposites.

In the elliptic theory of imagination I thus assert that only when learner’s imaginings were neither too far from, nor too close to, their material realities, were learners able to imagine, and so plot the way towards achieving a dematerial reality (*We are faced with peer pressure and illegal substances..... I therefore imagine a school in which people’s individuality is respected so we are not forced to follow the crowd.....in such a school I could most definitely perform well*). It was only at points of orbit at which the dematerial reality was possible that learners were able to imagine a liberated future reality, free from social injustices which riddled their past and present experiences. This is evidenced in findings 4 and 5 which respectively state that 4) Learners do have imaginings of success but they are

influenced by exposure to social injustices in their school (from theme 4), and 5) Learners have the potential to transcend their circumstances through their imaginings of success.

The elliptic theory of imagination therefore explains not only the influence that social injustices in one's material and immaterial realities has on one's imagination, but also serves to show how the free movement of imagination, as originally highlighted by Deleuze (1994), allows imagination to act as a vehicle for liberation, provided imagination is at a point along its orbit around material realities which allow for this. This was shown above in the instance of Toby's imagination where he eventually imagined the following of school rules and motivating oneself to do well, both of which are attainable in the circumstances described by him. In other words, a point which is neither too close to, nor too far from one's material reality is desired if imagination is to truly act as a vehicle for liberation.

## **7.6 Traversing the Elliptic Theory of Imagination**

It seems only appropriate for me to now briefly attempt to demonstrate how the elliptic theory of imagination may be related to the experiences, recollections and imaginings of at least one of the learners who participated in my study. Applying the elliptic theory of imagination to the data obtained from Britany should demonstrate how she was able to move from her present (material reality), towards imagining a future (dematerial reality) despite the limitations inherent in her material reality and, oftentimes lingering memories of injustices from her past (immaterial reality). The elliptic theory of imagination should therefore highlight how it became possible for learners whose pasts and presents, despite being riddled with social injustices, were able to use imagination as a vehicle for liberation and thus be transported towards liberated futures.

I have elected to use the data from Britany for the reason that, in my view, her responses were rather mature and rich in data relevant to my study. Also, her imaginings, in my opinion, and as I intend to demonstrate in my discussion below, followed an elliptical orbit around her material realities. Nevertheless, I feel that it should be noted that each of the learners, who



participated in my study, had imaginings that followed an elliptical orbit around their material realities and were therefore able to eventually successfully arrive at imagining a dematerial reality free from instances of social injustices. I therefore focused specifically on examples from Toby's imaginings above, and I make reference to some of Khethiwe's imaginings below while electing to primarily use Britany's for the traversing of my theory. I do this because in all honesty it could have just as easily been any one of the learners who participated in my study whose imaginings I may have used to show the traversing of my theory. Such is the case as each of them ultimately imagined in a manner which followed an elliptical orbit around their material realities, but nevertheless Britany's responses emerged as being most mature and easily relatable to my theory.

I have marked in red, numbers on the diagram below which mark each of the four orbital points at which my discussion will be focussed. The corresponding sub-headings for each number are as follows: 1) Elliptically traversing the past immaterial reality with limitations close to the perihelion; 2) Elliptically traversing the present, socially unjust material reality at the perihelion; 3) Crossing the border to arrive at a socially just, liberated and dematerial reality along an elliptical orbit and 4) Elliptically traversing an unrealistic imagination at the aphelion. I discuss orbital point 4 before 3 as orbital point 3 remains the ultimate and desired destination.

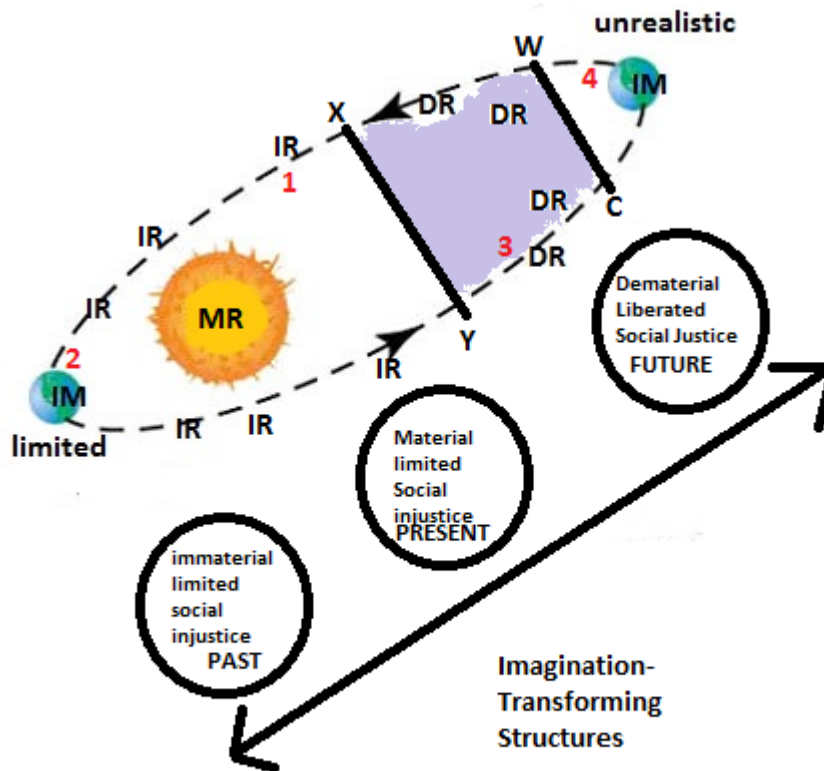


Figure 7.7

### 7.6.1 Elliptically Traversing the Past Immaterial Reality with Limitations Close to the Perihelion

One's immaterial, past reality, for the purposes of my elliptic theory of imagination, tends to influence imagination when imaginings are close to the perihelion. However, in this area imaginings are not as close to the perihelion as when they are influenced by material realities. This point is marked in red as orbital point 1 in the diagram above. Nevertheless, here one's imagination remains influenced by past immaterial realities if such imagination is close enough to the perihelion to be influenced by the limitations inherent in points of orbit which are relatively close to the perihelion itself; but not at the perihelion, because at such a point material reality would influence imagination. One may recall that both past and present realities, in the instances of the learners in my study and as shown in the example of Toby, above, were riddled with social injustices and therefore incapable of escaping the associated limitations of such injustices.

In my data analysis, Brittany recalled how the presence of the refinery acted as a distraction (*Oh yes! That Refinery is a distraction. I remember the fire at the refinery. That day People were taking pictures and sending them to each other. Nobody was concentrating on school work.*). This relates directly to finding number 2 “Learners learn in environments of fear where their paths to success are often blocked.” Indeed being distracted, and perhaps distracted by fear would result in one’s path to success being blocked. Brittany went on to recall how, many school days were wasted as learners remained fascinated with a fire which broke out at the refinery (*Even a few days after that, people were talking about the fire and basically wasting whole periods just talking about it.*) Such an experience, although existing in one’s past, and therefore according to Deleuze (1994) in one’s immaterial reality, nevertheless served to limit one’s imagining of success as many learners, including Brittany, for a while focussed solely on the fire which had broken out at the refinery, rather than directing their efforts towards performing well academically.

Following Freire’s (1996) work as well as relying on Deleuze’s (1994) theory of imagination it was desirable for the learners’ thinkings and understandings of their realities to, through the use of imagination, move beyond limitations inherent in past experiences towards being in positions to claim liberation. The limitations of past experiences were indeed evidenced in Brittany’s recollections of past experiences as her imaginings when related to those past experiences tended to be somewhat limited (*What’s happening around me really does influence the way I perform..... it gets in the way of my schooling success.... I would feel more motivated if a simple thing like keeping steps clean took place*). Brittany thus found it difficult to imagine future success while past experiences non-conducive to the attainment of academic success, including that of a fire at the refinery, remained in her mind.

Based on the above, Brittany’s imaginings tended, in accordance with the elliptic theory of imagination, to hover around the perihelion. I, in my theory, associate this area (close to the perihelion) with limitations on imagination. This is because at this point of orbit one’s immaterial reality may be found, but nevertheless this point remains too close to one’s material reality and therefore too close to the associated limitations of a material and immaterial reality. In the instance above, the immaterial reality of Britany consisted of a fire at the refinery acting as a distraction from learning. This was coupled with the view that

what has happened around one gets in the way of academic success. The need to sufficiently free one's self from constraints of the past was therefore highlighted. Thus I argue that being able to move imagination out of this orbital zone, which remains close to limitations from past experiences and linked to findings of distractions and the blocking of paths to success, would be required if one were to imagine success which is attainable in a future reality. Being able to imagine success in an attainable future reality despite all past and present experiences of social injustices and their associated limitations placed on one is what indeed happened with the learners in my study as their imaginings followed an elliptical orbit around their material realities.

### **7.6.2 Elliptically Traversing the Present, Socially Unjust Material Reality at the Perihelion**

With reference to the diagram above, the next point of orbit, marked as 2 in red is linked to the circle of the present and represents all points closest to one's material reality. This is naturally so as one's material reality does exist in one's present. Such a point, as explained earlier will be referred to as the perihelion. The perihelion, for purposes of the elliptic theory of imagination is the place along imagination's orbit which is closest to one's material reality and therefore also a space of limited imagination, just like the immaterial reality discussed above. Except here (at the perihelion), imagination is limited by present rather than past experiences.

Deleuze (1994), as one may recall, has contended that imagination may be used to move one's thinking beyond what is known from past and present experiences to what has never been experienced and therefore remains unknown. The learners in my study; and for the purposes of my current discussion, Brittany in particular, spoke of past and present experiences riddled with social injustices (*I forgot my drawing board in the previous class. I was too scared to ask if I could get it, but I was also very afraid that someone may steal it.*). However, at this point of orbit in my elliptic theory of imagination I will focus only on present experiences of social injustices and how they served to limit one's imagination with reference to the attainment of academic success. This focus relates directly to findings 2 and

3, being that 2) Learners learn in environments of fear where their paths to success are often blocked (from theme 2), and 3) Learners learn in spaces which represent unequal power relations (from theme 3). As expressed in my data analysis such environments are not conducive to the attainment of academic success.

When considering some of the words of Brittany an absence of substantive equality in her material realities was certainly evident (*if people who are top of the class are battling imagine how much worse it is for those who were just pushed up. And there are so many of those in this school; the extra classes do help me, but the problem is that it's too tiring..... You could rather use that energy to study on your own; they do it simply for themselves as the teacher will remain unimpressed*). A lack of substantive equality most certainly, according to Gynther (2009) produces environments in which the prospects of being successful are rather bleak. My finding that learners experience a schooling system which caters very little for diversity is of relevance here as the application of formal equality rather than substantive equality tends to support such finding. Britany spoke of how very little motivation was given to learners by teachers simply because not much was expected in general concerning the academic performance of all learners who attend their school (*when these learners do occasionally perform well, they do it simply for themselves as the teacher will remain unimpressed*). Another learner, Khethiwe went as far as explaining that it is difficult to maintain a desire to perform well when very little motivation is given to one (*With so few people motivating you, you lose your desire to perform well*). This certainly supported Britany's claim that when learners do, occasionally perform well, they tend to do so for themselves as not much was expected of them by teachers.

Given that in any context it is reasonable to assume that learner academic performance will differ from learner to learner, it is therefore apparent to me that diversity is seldom catered for, if at all, in the material realities faced by the learners in my study. With all learners being treated the same, that is to say, with very little expectations placed on them it is reasonable to assert that the application of formal equality prevailed in the material realities of the learners in my study. Britany, and likely all who participated in my study, faced in their material realities a repetition of experiences concerning having very little being expected of them.

Essentially, the learners in my study experienced a very limited view concerning their prospects of attaining academic success exerted on them by teachers in their school.

I am reminded, at this juncture; that Deleuze (1994) asserted that imagination may certainly be limited by a repeated exposure to limitations inherent in one's material reality. Deleuze (1994) went on to postulate that such repetition changes little in the object repeated but has a profound effect on the mind of the one who contemplates it. Following from these assertions, and relating them to my elliptic theory of imagination, I think it reasonable for me to contend that at this orbital point on the diagram above (point 2), the imaginations of the learners in my study would have indeed been limited by experiences which existed in their material realities. In this case, the repeated experiences of having low expectations exerted on them concerning the attainment of academic success, refers.

Indeed a finding highlighted in my data analysis (listed as Finding number 1 in this chapter), being the finding that learners are constantly exposed to low expectations, comes to the fore at this point of traversing the elliptic theory of imagination. Learners' imaginations at this orbital point (point 2, at the perihelion) are certainly limited by experiences of social injustices in their material realities. In this case, the social injustice of repeated exposure to low expectations coupled with the application of formal equality served to limit imaginings of success. Such was the case as learners' imaginations at this orbital point tended to hover too close to one's material reality and I thus contend were scorched by the limitations and injustices present in their material realities. Britany's assertion that little motivation, if any, was provided to learners, coupled with Khethiwe's claim that a lack of motivation makes it difficult for one to maintain a desire to perform well, are testament to this contention.

### **7.6.3 Elliptically Traversing an Unrealistic Imagination at the Aphelion**

Typical of the back and forth movement of imagination as expressed by Deleuze (1994), at times learners' imaginations tended to drift too far from their material realities to a point of orbit known as the aphelion, or in my diagram above, point 4. At this orbital point learners'

imaginings were at a point furthest from their material realities and required moving back towards their material realities so as to imagine in more realistic fashions. It was at this furthest point of orbit, the aphelion, that learners' imaginings for the most part became somewhat unrealistic (*I imagine myself owning a flying car so I can fly over the houses of those who doubted me and drop poop bombs on them.*).

Deleuze (1994), as mentioned previously, argued in favour of realistic imaginings. He went on to argue that in order to ensure realistic imaginings a realistic imaginative attitude was required. However, Deleuze (1994) further argued that one must employ some degree of accuracy when imagining so as to ensure the existence of a realistic imaginative attitude. After having expressed what little motivation learners are given in school and how low the expectations exerted on them were, Brittany went on to imagine the attainment of success. However, at times she did so in fashions that, given her schooling context; were rather unrealistic. For instance, she ironically imagined receiving much encouragement, which she believed would bring about success (*I imagine myself receiving much encouragement..... and that would just fit in well with a scenario where I am very successful*). Khethiwe, however, imagined learning in a better performing, private school (*I could do even better if I was in a better resourced school, or a better performing school like the private schools*).

Neither of the imaginings expressed by Brittany nor Khethiwe above can be considered realistic. This is because in the case of Khethiwe, one is not suddenly going to, dare I say, evaporate from one's present context of a generally poor performing, government school, and then suddenly reappear in a well performing, private school. Even if that were the case, the sudden appearance of one in a private school in no way guarantees the attainment of academic success. With reference to Brittany's imagining, I also find it to be unrealistic. The reason for this is that both she and Khethiwe had already expressed just what little motivation they receive from teachers, generally. Given that Brittany made no mention in her imagining of what may result in teachers suddenly motivating learners, after failing to do so for extended periods, it seems unlikely, and therefore unrealistic to expect to suddenly exist in a school where teachers who previously barely motivated learners are suddenly providing ample motivation.

It is apparent that both Brittany and Khethiwe's imaginings concerning motivation from teachers and learning in a private, well performing school, respectively, are imaginings that are rather far removed from their material realities. These imaginings are so far removed that I feel I would be justified in arguing that they exist at the orbital point of the aphelion in the elliptic theory of imagination (along with Toby's imagining of the flying car and poop bombs which clearly does not require justification for being placed at this orbital point). As such, these imaginings are unrealistic in nature and learners who found themselves with such imaginings would need for their imaginations to follow the orbit closer to orbital point 3. Orbital point 3 represents an area in which imaginings remain somewhat realistic and accurate to one's circumstances, but are nevertheless capable of presenting possibilities and ways of transcending limitations inherent in one's past and present realities.

#### **7.6.4 Crossing the Border to Arrive at a Socially Just, Liberated and Dematerial Reality along an Elliptical Orbit**

I will now focus on orbital point 3 in my diagram above. It is at this point that learners' imaginings cross the border between a body of knowledge that is known and a body of knowledge that is unknown, crossing towards the unknown. The known body of knowledge comprises knowledge known through past experiences in one's immaterial reality as well as knowledge known through repeated experiences in one's material reality. Crossing the border of knowledge to a body of knowledge that is unknown through having never been experienced requires the use of imagination (Deleuze, 1994). Imagination, at this point, therefore enables learners' to consider a dematerial reality free from social injustices. Essentially a future reality in which structures have been transformed so as to reduce the likelihood of the oppressed continuing to be beings for others, as proffered by Freire (1996), is imagined and therefore thought of. In taking learners' thinking to such a point, imagination, in my opinion, acts as a vehicle for liberation.

At this orbital point, point 3 and its surrounds (the lavender zone) despite crossing over to a body of knowledge that has never been known, imaginings here, considering my previous sub-heading, remain realistic. This is the case because these imaginings do not exist at the



aphelion. They do however; exist far enough from the perihelion and material realities to avoid being limited by experiences that exist in one's past and present realities. Imaginings around orbital point 3, in what I refer to as the lavender zone, in not being at the aphelion, are capable of maintaining a degree of accuracy in line with the realistic imaginative attitude to which Deleuze (1994) refers. These imaginings, as explained above, are neither limited by experiences from one's past (immaterial reality) as they are not at the perihelion, nor are they limited by repeated experiences in one's present, material reality, as they do not orbit too close to one's material reality.

Suffice to say, an imagining which exists in the lavender zone is, for the purposes of my study, an ideal imagining capable of being attained and so resulting in imagination truly and effectively operating as a vehicle for liberation. Brittany and Khethiwe both eventually arrived at imaginings which I believe fell within this lavender zone. Brittany expressed that she could certainly imagine herself working much harder and so attaining academic success (*I need to have fun with my friends but I know it gets in the way of my schooling success.....I would feel more motivated to be there if a simple thing like keeping steps clean took place..... I would be much happier in a place like that and so I would work harder..... the result would be greater success*). Khethiwe imagined dedicating more time to studying and the finding of a space conducive to studying (*I imagine myself being successful, but only if I can find time and the right space to study*). Both of these imaginings, in my view, possess the characteristics of imaginings which exist within the lavender zone along imagination's elliptical orbit around material realities; as they are neither unrealistic nor do they seem to be limited by past and repeated (present) experiences.

In my view, both Brittany who imagines working harder and Khethiwe who imagines dedicating more time to her studies express, in these instances, imaginings that are not limited by past experiences (immaterial reality) or by repeated experiences (material reality). For if they were, it is likely that neither learner would even begin to imagine either working harder or dedicating more time to their studies as they would likely feel that such was not possible, given their contexts of learning. This therefore places these imaginings far enough from the associated limited influences present at the perihelion along imagination's elliptical orbit. Nevertheless, both imaginings do not stray too far from the learners' material realities and

become unrealistic as working harder and dedicating more time to studies do not seem to require unrealistic changes and are therefore most certainly reasonably attainable for each of these learners. I accordingly feel it safe to assert that these two imaginings expressed by Brittany and Khethiwe do not get too close to the aphelion and the unrealistic imaginative attitudes present at this point of orbit.

The attainment of academic success if one were to work harder and dedicate more time towards one's studies is a likely outcome. Both Brittany and Khethiwe, having imagined realistically and in a fashion reasonably free from the limitations of their past and repeated experiences would likely achieve success were they to make such imaginings a reality. In essence, they would have each transcended their circumstances riddled with social injustices through using imagination as a vehicle for liberation. It is therefore apparent that, in accordance with my elliptic theory of imagination, it is only possible for imagination to act as a vehicle for liberation, as demonstrated above, if one's imagination exists at or around orbital point 3, an area otherwise known as the lavender zone. It was in this zone that imagination, acting as a vehicle for liberation, transported learners' thinking from the known to the unknown. This certainly correlates with findings 4 and 5 which state that 4) Learners do have imaginings of success but they are influenced by exposure to social injustices in their school (from theme 4), and 5) Learners have the potential to transcend their circumstances through their imaginings of success (from theme 5).

## **7.7 Chapter Conclusion**

Traversing the elliptic theory of imagination as demonstrated through the instances, accounts and imaginings of Brittany (and at times Khethiwe and Toby) above, certainly correlates with the five findings highlighted in the beginning of this chapter. For instance, while traversing the elliptic theory of imagination; learners did indeed imagine success with imaginings, at times, being influenced by past and present experiences (Finding 4). The ability of the learners to eventually imagine realistically and so plot a way towards the transcending of their circumstances corresponded with finding 5. In doing this, imagination indeed acted as a

vehicle for liberation by transporting learners' thinking from a past often riddled with social injustices towards a future reality free from social injustices.

Nevertheless, the back and forth movement characteristic of imagination, as proffered by Deleuze (1994), was evident in my discussion above. This back and forth movement made it possible for one's imagination to not only follow an elliptical orbit around material realities, but also to move back into the so called lavender zone of orbit, an area in which imagining reasonably attainable dematerial realities was possible. Were it not for the ability of imagination to move both back and forth, while transporting one's thinking with it, it is doubtful that it would have been possible for one to use imagination as a vehicle for liberation.

Learners' imaginations throughout the process of data collection in my study followed an elliptical orbit around their material realities. At some times their imaginings were too close to their material realities and were thus limited by experiences that may have prevailed in such realities. While at other times learners' imaginings drifted too far from their material realities and became unrealistic and therefore the attainability of these remained unlikely. However, there were times when learners' imaginings were neither too close to, nor too far from, their material realities and thus avoided being limited and unrealistic. It was at these times, when learners' imaginings existed within the lavender zone along the elliptical orbit around their material realities that their imaginations were truly able to act as a vehicle for liberation.

In this chapter I have attempted to explain how five of my findings as well as the merging of some key concepts of Deleuze's (1994) theory on imagination and Freire's (1996) theory concerning liberation assisted me in developing what I have called, the elliptic theory of imagination. This theory has served to constitute the theorising aspect of my study. I have attempted to explain, in great detail, while being deliberately repetitive for purposes of clarity (considering the complexity of this theory), exactly what the elliptic theory of imagination is and how it relates directly to learners' imaginations, especially when, for the purposes of social justice, one attempts to use imagination as a vehicle for liberation. By demonstrating

how the imaginations of one, two and sometimes three of the learners who participated in my study traversed my theory it is hoped that the relevance and accuracy of my theory when practically applied may be realised. In my next chapter I will present the conclusion to my study which will focus on the degree to which my initial objectives have been reached.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **After Imagining**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter constituted the theorising aspect of my study in which I presented my elliptic theory of imagination. In this chapter I will attempt to bring my study to a coherent close. As my study draws to a close, in essence “after imagining,” as the title of this chapter suggests, I find myself faced with having to make recommendations. Before doing so, I feel it necessary to remind the reader of what it is I initially set out to do. I will do this in the hope that doing so will provide some clarity concerning how I arrived at the recommendations which I will make. Prior to making my recommendations, I will also respond to the four research questions which framed my study.

When I commenced my study I wished to fathom how learners’ experiences of social injustices and, more importantly, how their imaginings of success influenced academic performance. The phenomenon which I studied was therefore learners’ imaginings of success. To study this phenomenon my study was guided by the following four research questions: 1) what are learners’ experiences of social injustices? 2) How might these social injustices and socially unjust spaces influence learners’ imaginings of success? 3) How might these imaginings influence learner performance? And, 4) why might these imaginings have influenced learner performance in the way learners say they did? Under my next heading I will attempt to highlight how my study responded to each of these research questions.

#### **8.2 Responding to the Research Questions**

As one may recall, I deliberately set out my two data analysis chapters in such a manner that themes which responded to the same research questions were grouped together. Thus, drawing from the emergent themes in my data analysis chapters, I am now able to respond to each of my four research questions. As explained in the introduction to chapter five, the first

two themes in my analysis focused on experiences of social injustices and thus respond to my first research question. The third theme focused on the spaces that represent social injustices and thus responded to my second research question; while the fourth and fifth themes, each focussing on imaginings of success, respectively responded to my third and fourth research questions.

### **8.2.1 Learners Experiences of Social Injustices**

In response to my first research question, learners' experiences of social injustices include having low expectations exerted on them by teachers and parents as well as having to learn in spaces that instil fear in them. In addition, learners experience social injustices in that they find their school to be both unwelcoming and undesirable in nature. Learners are also expected to learn in a context in which the doctoring of results and the implementation of impractical policies is commonplace.

Finally, learners' experiences of social injustices extend to instances of categorisation, the facing of blocked paths to success, and having to learn in environments of chaos and unruly behaviour which are riddled with distractions. It is not surprising then that the learners in my study found it difficult to divorce themselves from their material realities, especially when they were required to imagine realities that were somewhat different from their everyday experiences. However, writings under my next heading respond more specifically to the question of how experiences of social injustices influenced imaginings of success.

### **8.2.2 How Social Injustices Influence Imaginings of Success**

With respect to my second research question, being that of how might experiences of social injustices influence imaginings of success learners mentioned "depictions of a sad present;" as well as, "unequal distributions of power." It was suggested by the learners who participated in my study that having to be greeted each day by pictures of members of

government, in particular, members whom they associated with corruption, which adorned the reception area made it difficult for them to remain hopeful of a brighter future. In essence, the presence of these pictures made it difficult for the learners to imagine success as these pictures simply reminded them of the sad state of affairs prevalent within South Africa as a result of a generally corrupt ANC lead government.

In addition, the unequal distribution of power within the school influenced learners' imaginings of success. Learners claimed that certain areas in the school represented power and therefore whoever had access to such areas was automatically placed in a position of power. There were also claims made that some areas were provided with better facilities than others as people who were more likely to use such areas were considered more important. Essentially learners asserted that being denied access to areas which represented power evoked in them feelings of powerlessness. Feeling powerless made it difficult for learners to imagine futures in which they were successful.

### **8.2.3 How Imaginings Influence Performance**

Concerning my third research question, evidenced in the data was that the learners who participated in my study were indeed capable of imagining ways in which their academic performances may be improved. They did this despite the circumstances to which they were exposed in their material realities. Learners imagined ways in which they would be able to rebel against social injustices. These ways included the writing off of impractical, policy-laden attempts at improving performance as a waste of time. They did this as many of the attempts written into policy, according to the learners, only served to hinder their academic performance.

The learners in my study also identified causes of their poor academic performance and began to imagine ways of overcoming them. Causes identified included impractical policies, as mentioned above as well as being surrounded by people who simply did not care about the academic success of the learners. They thus imagined ways of performing well despite the

identified causes. They accordingly imagined being around people who encouraged them in the absence of impractical policies. They therefore eventually came to the realisation that in order to increase their chances of performing well they needed to seek alternative sources of help, as well as reject policies which they found to be impractical. Such policies included the implementation of extra lessons which many learners found to be a waste of their time. Learners' imaginings therefore paved a way forward towards their eventual attainment of academic success.

#### **8.2.4 Reasons why Imaginings Influence Performance**

Concerning my final research question of why imaginings influence academic performance in the way in which they do, what can be said is that learners through imagining ways to address social injustices inevitably imagined change. It was this imagining of change which I believe positively influenced academic performance. Irrespective as to whether this imagining of change applied to one's physical environment, or simply to one's own outlook and indeed how one motivates oneself to perform better; imagining change resulted in learners being able to see a way towards achieving improved academic performance.

Learners imagined learning in environments in which school and personal property was valued. They imagined attaining academic success in what to them, was an ideal setting. Such setting included for some, educators who motivate learners; and a less chaotic environment for others. While for others still, it entailed the mere absence of feelings of fear. Ultimately for the learners in my study, just being able to imagine what was required to enhance their chances of being academically successful placed them in a position to see clearly what changes they could realistically make themselves to achieve success. Thus, as indicated above, merely imagining success and the changes required to achieve it enhanced learners' abilities to achieve academic success.



### **8.3 Significance of My Study**

My study is of significance within the discipline of social justice as it highlights the fact that change need not be immediately effected in one's physical surrounds. Rather, change can indeed simply begin in the mind despite adverse material realities. Thus, it is hoped that social justice practitioners who have all too often been accused of coming across as rather aggressive when trying to bring about change will come to realise that if imagining an ideal can be promoted then it may, from that point, be somewhat easier to bring about change in spaces of social injustice.

With respect to education, my study is significant because it shows that anyone is capable of achieving academic success despite their context. If one can just begin to imagine a way forward, surely academic success can be achieved. Thus, it is hoped that both educational experts and learners benefit from this message. Educational experts should therefore encourage the imagining of success while learners should simply embrace imagining success despite whatever hardships they may be facing.

### **8.4 Beneficence of My Study**

The twelve learners who participated in my study, did, to an extent, benefit from their participation as they were each able to eventually imagine success. Remaining in line with the teachings of Freire (1970), my role was not simply to research, but also entailed attempting to bring about change in the lives of the participants. Thus, using my data collection instruments in the manner in which I did (as explained in chapter four) assisted tremendously in freeing the minds of the twelve participants in my study. I believe I did bring about change in this way as each of the twelve participants were able to eventually imagine success despite their previous and ongoing exposure to social injustices.

It is hoped, however, that my study will serve to benefit many other learners who find themselves in similar circumstances to the twelve who participated in my study. As, hopefully, my study will highlight a way forward towards the attainment of academic success, despite what material limitations one may be facing. As shown in my study, through the use of imagination one may be in a position to better plot a way forward, away from what has been repeatedly experienced towards what has never been experienced. In essence, a socially just environment suddenly becomes an immense possibility, even if it is just in the minds of the oppressed.

### **8.5 Recommendations and Conclusion of My Study**

Having responded to my research questions, highlighted the significance of my study as well as having indicated who may have benefited from my study, I am now in a position to bring my study to a close. In all honesty, it is with mixed emotions that I do so. I am indeed joyful because the completion of a doctoral thesis is something joyous. However, having allowed my study to form such an integral part of my life for a number of years now, I feel slightly sorrowful to bid it farewell. Nevertheless, as far as recommendations are concerned, what I would like to say is: Imagine! Every learner should simply imagine.

Indeed in light of my study, one recommendation which I can make without waver, is that one must, despite one's circumstances, imagine the ideal. In imagining the ideal, working towards it and eventually attaining it, as evidenced in the experiences shared by the learners in my study, becomes much easier than having not imagined it. I would like to go one step further by extending my recommendation to apply to educators, principals and indeed anyone involved in education particularly, as well as to anyone in a position to influence the development of another. I say to them too, imagine, and certainly encourage in those whom you are trying to develop, especially previously disadvantaged groups, a keenness to also imagine despite the immediate circumstances. Imagine success.....

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**Information Letter**

Dear Principal/Official at the DoE

This study is located within a broader NRF funded study which focuses on what explains learners' poor performance in South African schools. However, the aim of this particular study is to explore how learners' experiences of social injustice and their imaginings of success influence learner performance. The study is supervised by Prof. Labby Ramrathan (tel 031 260 8064), an associate professor in the school of Education and Development, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

I am a Ph.D student at UKZN, and this study forms part of my degree.

I would like to engage twelve learners from this school (3 learners from each grade, Grades 8-11) in a photo elicitation (25-30 minutes in length), I will require that they write an imaginative narrative (to be done at their convenience), I will facilitate an individual interview with each of them (35-40 minutes in length), as well as facilitate a focus group discussion with all twelve participants at once (roughly two hours in length). I will retain their written narrative to use in my data analysis and their spoken views will be recorded in writing as well as via means of a voice recorder. The data will be completely anonymous i.e. it will not be possible for it to be linked to the participant's names as well as the name of their school. The data will be used in my doctoral thesis at the University of KwaZulu-Natal titled, *Imagining success, experiencing social injustices and learner poor performance*.

Neither you nor your school will be disadvantaged if you choose not to participate or if you choose to leave/withdraw from the study at any stage. Upon the completion of my study the outcomes of my study will be presented to you at a seminar, and printed copies of these outcomes will be made available. Should you object to any of the findings, they will not be published. If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, please contact Prof. Labby Ramrathan: Tel 031 260 8064: email: [ramrathanp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ramrathanp@ukzn.ac.za), alternatively you may contact Ms. P. Ximba at the research office. Tel: 031 260 3587: email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study

Wade Cafun

Cell: 0711212414

Email: [wade1509@hotmail.com](mailto:wade1509@hotmail.com)

**Consent Form**

I \_\_\_\_\_, have read the letter of information which explains the purpose of this research, and the steps that will be taken to protect the learners' confidentiality as well as that of the school. I fully understand the terms under which I will participate in this study; and I understand that to sign this form means that I have agreed to them. I know that I can contact Prof. Labby Ramrathan or the research office if I have any questions, concerns or complaints. I am fully aware that participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time,

I, the undersigned, agree to participate in this study.

.....	.....	.....
Principal's/DoE Official's Name	Principal's/DoE Official's Signature	Date

**Information Letter**

Dear Participant

This study is located within a broader NRF funded study which focuses on what explains learners' poor performance in South African schools. However, the aim of this particular study is to explore how learners' experiences of social injustice and their imaginings of success influence learner performance. The study is supervised by Prof. Labby Ramrathan (tel 031 260 8064), an associate professor in the school of Education and Development, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

I am a Ph.D student at UKZN, and this study forms part of my degree.

I would like to engage you in a photo elicitation (25-30 minutes in length), I will require that you write an imaginative narrative (to be done at your convenience), I will facilitate an individual interview with you (35-40 minutes in length), as well as facilitate a focus group discussion with you and eleven other participants (roughly two hours in length). I will retain your written narrative to use in my data analysis and your spoken views will be recorded in writing as well as via means of a voice recorder. The data will be completely anonymous i.e. it will not be possible for it to be linked to your name as well as the name of your school. The data will be used in my doctoral thesis at the University of KwaZulu-Natal titled, *Imagining success, experiencing social injustices and learner poor performance*.

Neither you nor your school will be disadvantaged if you choose not to participate or if you choose to leave/withdraw from the study at any stage. Upon the completion of my study the outcomes of my study will be presented to you and your parents/legal guardians at a seminar, and printed copies of these outcomes will be made available. Should you object to any of the findings, they will not be published. If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, please contact Prof. Labby Ramrathan: Tel 031 260 8064: email: [ramrathanp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ramrathanp@ukzn.ac.za), alternatively you may contact Ms. P. Ximba at the research office. Tel: 031 260 3587: email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study

Wade Cafun

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Email: [wade1509@hotmail.com](mailto:wade1509@hotmail.com)

### Consent Form

I \_\_\_\_\_, have read the letter of information which explains the purpose of this research, and the steps that will be taken to protect my confidentiality. I fully understand the terms under which I will participate in this study; and I understand that to sign this form means that I have agreed to them. I know that I can contact Prof. Labby Ramrathan or the research office if I have any questions, concerns or complaints. I am fully aware that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time,

I, the undersigned, agree to participate in this study.

.....	.....	.....
Participant's Name	Participant's Signature	Date

.....	.....	.....
Parent's/Guardian's Name	Parent's/Guardian's Signature	Date



16 July 2015

Mr Wade Cesaree' Cafun 204500332  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Cafun

Protocol reference number: HSS/0223/015D  
Project title: Imaging Success, Experiencing Social Injustices and Learner Poor Performance

**Full Approval and Change of Site – Expedited Application**

In response to your application received on 11 March 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

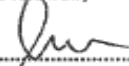
Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

Cc Supervisor: Prof Labby Ramrathan  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Prof P Morojele  
Cc School Administrator: Ms T Khumalo

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
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Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

This serves to record that I have carried out language editing on the thesis: *Imagining Success, Experiencing Social Injustices and Learner Poor Performance* by Wade Cafun

Aresh Woodraj BA, PGCE (Unisa)

High School English Teacher: 16 years' experience

Email: woods5154@gmail.com

Cell no: 0828398496

14 September 2018



There are days I imagine myself doing well academically at school and smile at the thought.

I imagine getting distinctions in matric, taking home the trophies and the acknowledgement of my success coming from teachers and parents.

Extra lessons for subjects that need improvement would be beneficial. Help from my family, in the sense that they create and allow an atmosphere of learning. Motivation from my friends, family, class mates and teachers would allow me to become confident in my work as they cheer me on and help where help is needed in any form. This will allow me to focus and do well. I need to prove people wrong, that is motivation.

I have many aspirations in my life, one of which is to be happy. I want to be prosperous in many aspects and help others become successful along the way as well.

To be a mechanical engineer is a dream I can accomplish if I did exceptionally well at school. Working at a multi-millionaire company as an engineer. Its what I would most definitely