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How to cite this thesis
Towards the recognition of a Soweto boy's play capabilities in the formal education system

by

SHAFIKA ISAACS
217093760

THESIS
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at the
UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

SUPERVISOR: PROF ELIZABETH HENNING
CO-SUPERVISOR: PROF NICOLETTE ROBERTS

29 OCTOBER 2019
I declare that this is my original research for the purpose of the thesis, *Towards the recognition of a Soweto boy’s play capabilities in the formal education system*, and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

29 October 2019

___________________________
Shafika Isaacs

Date
DEDICATION

To Mummy and Daddy in heaven.

To Thulani Ncwane, Mathaa Mbokazi, Bheki and Oscar who fought courageously in the killing fields of Kwazulu Natal during the 1990s and who never got to tell their story.

And to Malihle and Lindo who still can.
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Kabelo, Kamu, Lindolani and Mandla thank you for welcoming me into your rich worlds and for teaching me so much.

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Jihad, Bilquis and Aydan Bardien: for sustaining me with your presence, home-baked cookies, for always laughing at my jokes and for making my heart bigger than my body.

Reza Bardien: my rock, my boulder, my North Star, my nurturing shoulder!

Mummy and Daddy: for love that is infinite.

And to the Almighty, for always being my anchor.

With heartfelt gratitude to you all. Thank you, ke a leboha, shukran, baie tramakasie. Alhamdulillah.
Through the voice of one Soweto boychild, named Kabelo, this study is an appeal for the recognition of the everyday play capabilities of township children in formal education practice, policy and research. It deliberately places under a microscope, a township boychild who is labelled in the formal education system as underperforming, learning-disabled and cognitively-challenged. In this respect, he is a consummate representative of a pattern of boy academic underperformance that has emerged in South Africa and worldwide, particularly in reading and literacy. This pattern feeds a dominant narrative about systemic learning deficits that risks the constant stigmatisation of the majority of South African children and renders their everyday worlds invisible.

The study’s purpose is to make visible Kabelo’s everyday playworld that lies hidden beneath his underperforming test-scores. By following Kabelo ethnographically for 17 months across the vast expanse of his life in Soweto, the study creates with his participation, a portrait of his everyday world of play and academic performance.

Through a social justice theoretical lens that foregrounds misrecognition, recognition and capabilities as distinct analytical constructs, Kabelo’s playworld is juxtaposed with his world of academic performance during the foundation phase of schooling. In the academic performance world, the dominant narrative is about his real struggles with reading in Sesotho and English and low performance based on a range of academic and psychological assessments.

Kabelo’s portrait is analysed as two, complex, dialectical, interacting activity systems based on activity systems analysis (ASA) as a heuristic tool. His portrait illuminates how much of his everyday lived experience is a lived play experience, where play is his way of being, in which his everyday world is predominantly a playworld. It shows how he makes sense of his world through varying forms of play, including digital play and as a multilingual playful child, he reveals a range of play capabilities that are integral to his funds of knowledge.
While identifying moments of similarity and recognition within and between his playworld and academic performance world as two interacting activity systems, the study illuminates dialectical contradictions that manifest as moments of systemic misrecognition. These manifestations of misrecognition require specific illumination as analytically distinct forms of *institutionalised inequality*. Kabelo as a playful child, his play tools and play capabilities are systemically misrecognised in his world of academic performance where, based on a host of assessment tools, he is primarily considered to be a severely cognitively-challenged learner with learning disabilities.

The study concludes that the township boychild’s everyday play, play tools and play capabilities should be considered as a critical register and mode of self-making that warrants socially-just recognition within the formal education system. It proposes that children’s play capabilities be recognised as being integral to their funds of knowledge, to counteract deficit narratives about academically-underperforming township children. It offers a preliminary list of play capabilities for consideration in policy and practice and draws out the implications for future scholarship, policy and practice on children, learning through play and digital learning.

Keywords: *children’s play, digital play, boys, play capabilities, underperformance, Soweto, critical ethnography, narrative, portraiture; social justice, misrecognition, activity theory*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Title</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN</strong></td>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 Standpoint epistemology</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 Qualitative inquiry</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.4 A critical ethnographic narrative portrait as a design hybrid</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.7 Data collection tools and instruments</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.8 Data collection and management</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.9 Data analysis: from data to portrait</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.10 Portrait interpretation using activity systems analysis (ASA)</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.11 The trustworthiness of the research</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.12 Researcher positionality and reflexivity</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.13 Research ethics</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.14 Summary</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FOUR: FROM DATA TO PORTRAIT: DATA ANALYSIS</strong></td>
<td>4.1 Introduction</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.2 Theoretical sampling: choosing to study Kabelo</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.3 Coding fieldwork data</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.4 Initial coding</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.5 Focused coding</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.6 From codes to categories</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.7 How ten themes emerged</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.8 Five overarching concepts</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.9 Writing Kabelo’s critical ethnographic narrative portrait</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.10 Summary</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FIVE: RECOGNISING KABELO’S PLAY CAPABILITIES</strong></td>
<td>5.1 Introduction</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2 Act 1: Kabelo’s knowing: <em>I know the way</em></td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.3. Act 2: Soweto as a vast playground: <em>I’m a Soweto boy</em></td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.4 Act 3: Joy at school: I love my teacher</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.5 Act 4: Pretend-play: <em>I play school</em></td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.6 Act 5: Game-play and making: <em>Mummy let’s make that</em></td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.7 Act 6: Digital play: I make selfies</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.8 Summary</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.9 Summary</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: THE RECOGNITION OF KABELO’S PLAY CAPABILITIES

6.1 Introduction: Kabelo’s portrait as two interacting activity systems

6.2 Similarities and dialectical contradictions

6.3 Critical conflicts as manifestations of misrecognition

6.4 Towards the socially-just recognition of children’s play capabilities

6.5 Research conclusions

REFERENCES

APPENDICE A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

APPENDIX C: ARTICLE ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANA</td>
<td>Annual National Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEPR</td>
<td>Centre for Education Practice Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPS</td>
<td>Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAT</td>
<td>Cultural-Historical Activity Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBE</td>
<td>Department of Basic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBST</td>
<td>District-Based Support Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOE</td>
<td>Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSD</td>
<td>Department of Social Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSEN</td>
<td>Learners with Special Educational Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOLT</td>
<td>Language of Learning and Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIRLS</td>
<td>Progress in Reading and Literacy Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Program for International Student Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAVLT</td>
<td>Rey Auditory-Verbal Learning Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACMEQ</td>
<td>Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SALLT</td>
<td>South African List Learning Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBST</td>
<td>School-Based Support Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIAS</td>
<td>Screening Identification Assessment and Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOWETO</td>
<td>South Western Township</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIMSS</td>
<td>Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UJ</td>
<td>University of Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 The research study as a narrative ................................................................. 6
Figure 2.1 Map of chapter topics .................................................................................. 26
Figure 3.1 The blend of ethnography, narrative inquiry and portraiture ....................... 84
Figure 3.2 Basic mediational triangle (Vygotsky, 1978) ................................................. 113
Figure 1.3. Expanded activity system model adapted from Engeström (2015, p. 62) .... 114
Figure 3.4 Two interacting activity systems (Engeström, 2006, p. 3) ....................... 115
Figure 3.5 The structure of a playworld and academic performance as two interacting activity systems (Engeström, 1987, p. 78) ........................................ 116
Figure 4.1a Theoretical sampling and coding ............................................................... 129
Figure 4.1b Codes to categories ................................................................................... 130
Figure 4.1c Categories to themes ............................................................................... 130
Figure 4.1d From themes to overarching concepts ...................................................... 131
Figure 4.2 Assessment Decisions: 2015-2017 ............................................................... 136
Figure 4.3 General Assessment Comments 2015-2017 ............................................... 137
Figure 4.4 English First Additional Language (EFAL) test scores graph: 2015-2017 ... 137
Figure 4.5 Sesotho class test ....................................................................................... 139
Figure 4.6 Playing with WordSearch ......................................................................... 143
Figure 4.7 House in Moletsane ................................................................................. 143
Figure 4.8 Screen shot from home visit video ............................................................ 144
Figure 4.9 Kabelo’s Storyboard .................................................................................. 145
Figure 4.10 Kabelo’s selfie ....................................................................................... 146
Figure 4.11 From codes to categories ........................................................................ 149
Figure 4.12 Playing with WordSearch ....................................................................... 150
Figure 4.13 House in Moletsane .............................................................................. 150
Figure 4.14 Kabelo’s selfie ....................................................................................... 151
Figure 4.15 From categories to themes ..................................................................... 152
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Brief overview of research on social justice in education ........................................... 30
Table 2.2a Comparing three lists of capabilities: life and bodily health ........................................ 64
Table 2.1b Comparing three lists of capabilities: imagination, knowledge, aspiration .................... 65
Table 2.1c Comparing three lists of capabilities: emotion and mental well-being .......................... 65
Table 2.1d Comparing three lists of capabilities: respect, affiliation, participation .......................... 66
Table 2.1e Comparing three lists of capabilities: play, voice and environment ............................... 67
Table 3.1 Saturday digital storying-telling workshops .................................................................... 100
Table 3.2 Document reviewed in this study ..................................................................................... 103
Table 3.3 Fieldwork planning ......................................................................................................... 106
Table 3.4 Extract from field notes ................................................................................................ 109
Table 3.5 Summary of data sources, data collection and data capture .......................................... 111
Table 3.2 Types of discursive manifestations of contradictions (Engeström & Sannino, 2011, p.375) ........................................................................................................................................121
Table 4.1 Coding of first classroom observation: introduction to Kabelo ........................................ 135
Table 4.2 Word clouds and graph on Kabelo’s term report assessments ........................................ 136
Table 4.3 Example of initial coding of policy document review ....................................................... 138
Table 4.4 Initial coding of a slice of text from Kabelo’s Learner Profile .......................................... 138
Table 4.5 Initial coding of a review of Sesotho class test assessment ............................................. 139
Table 4.6 Initial coding from a focus group discussion: I am Kabelo
Table 4.7 Initial coding: participant observation of a drive through Soweto
Table 4.8 Coding photographs
Table 4.9 Coding video documentation: a moment in a home-based tavern
Table 4.10 Coding Kabelo’ storyboard
Table 4.11 Coding Kabelo’ selfies
Table 4.12 An illustration of coding across range of data forms
Table 4.13 From codes to categories: a home visit example
Table 4.14 From codes to categories: Kabelo’s selfies
Table 4.15 From categories to themes: Example of a home visit
Table 4.16 From categories to themes: Kabelo’s selfies
Table 4.17 Data Sources and Narrative Techniques
Table 6.1a Kabelo’s play capabilities compared with capabilities lists: play
Table 6.1b Kabelo’s play capabilities compared with capabilities lists: love & care
Table 6.1c Kabelo’s play capabilities compared with capabilities lists: life & bodily health
Table 6.1d Kabelo’s play capabilities compared with capabilities lists: imagination & knowledge
Table 6.1e. Kabelo’s play capabilities compared with capabilities lists: affiliation
LIST OF DATA DISPLAYS

Data Display 5.1 I am Kabelo ........................................................................................................ 164
Data Display 5.2 Kabelo’s portrait in ten acts ........................................................................... 167
Data Display 5.3 On the playground .......................................................................................... 168
Data Display 5.4 Kabelo taking photos of the route home .......................................................... 169
Data Display 5.5 A satellite view of the route to Moletsane ....................................................... 171
Data Display 5.6 A view of Soweto from inside the car ............................................................... 172
Data Display 5.7 Map of Soweto .............................................................................................. 173
Data Display 5.8 Doing homework in Dobsonville .................................................................... 177
Data Display 5.9 Kabelo at his grandfather’s house ................................................................. 178
Data Display 5.10 Kabelo’s Mapetla home ................................................................................ 179
Data Display 5.11 Celebrating Kabelo’s grandfather as pastor .................................................... 180
Data Display 5.12 Swimming at the Pomville Municipal pool ..................................................... 181
Data Display 5.13 Kabelo’s teacher whom he loves ................................................................. 183
Data Display 5.14 Kabelo’s storyboard on enjoying school ....................................................... 185
Data Display 5.15 Kabelo talking to his friend in class .............................................................. 186
Data Display 5.16 Kabelo and his friends on the playground ...................................................... 187
Data Display 5.17 Heritage day in class ..................................................................................... 188
Data Display 5.18 Kabelo playing by himself at home .............................................................. 189
Data Display 5.19 Building a truck with Lego® block ............................................................... 191
Data Display 5.20 Washing clothes at home ............................................................................. 193
Data Display 5.21 Getting ready for school .............................................................................. 194
Data Display 5.22 Kabelo demonstrating his video story .......................................................... 195
Data Display 5.23 Watching Msanzi TV ................................................................................... 197
Data Display 5.24 Kabelo’s selfies ............................................................................................ 198
Data Display 5.25 Doing arithmetic and spelling words ............................................................. 199
Data Display 5.26 Kabelo playing with his LeapPad ................................................................. 200
Data Display 5.27 Kabelo with his toy laptop .......................................................................... 200
Data Display 5.28 Reading the bible app .................................................................................. 201
Data Display 5.29 Interface of Kabelo’s tablet .......................................................................... 201
Data Display 5.30 Watching cartoons ...................................................................................... 202
While this thesis makes use of apartheid-classified racial categories, it does not subscribe to the notion of different racial categories and views them as political constructs. It supports the American Association of Physical Anthropologists Statement on Race and Racism, adopted in March 2019 in which they state: “Race does not provide an accurate representation of human biological variation. It was never accurate in the past, and it remains inaccurate when referencing contemporary human populations.” (American Association of Physical Anthropologists, 2019, p.1).
From binary to hyphenated,
I tentatively flap my still wet wings
Shedding the vestigial traditions
That anchored and bound me.

By Leah Schoenberg Muccio
(Muccio, Reybold, & Kidd, 2014 p.2)
PROLOGUE
MY JOURNEY TOWARDS THIS STUDY

We are not marginalised. We are sold out!

These were the words of a young ‘amajoni’ at a meeting of youth that I attended in 1998 in Inanda, a township near Durban, four years into South Africa’s democracy. I recalled this moment a few times since 2011 when I joined the world in witnessing unprecedented protests by children and youth demanding to be seen and for their voices be heard – first as leaders in struggles for democracy in the Arab Spring in 2011 (Mulderig, 2013), later as student struggles for affordable, quality public education in Chile (Espinoza & González, 2013); as calls for the decolonisation of South African universities by students in the ‘#fees must fall’ movement (Godsell & Chikane, 2016); and the protests by youth from the USA, against gun violence in schools. Among the most poignant moments for me, was when the dynamic 17-year old Edna Chavez told her heart-wrenching story to a rallying crowd of youth in California, with the words:

I learned to duck bullets long before I learned to read (CBS News, 2018)

As I conclude my PhD journey in 2019, a global climate strike (Channel 4 News, 2019) was under way, alongside protest marches against gender-based violence and xenophobia in South Africa, also led by teenagers, appealing for strong action against a tide of denialism and inaction (Smit & Saba, 2019. Mvumu, 2019). Having been a political activist as a teenager, and now a mother of a teenager and two young adults, these protests resonated strongly with me. They marked a series of awakenings to an inter-generational disconnection and how the older generation (including myself) have misread, misunderstood, misheard struggling children and youth who confront precarious conditions daily and who care profoundly about their future.

1 Amajoni is a Xhosa and Zulu word which means ‘soldier’. It is a term associated with the role played by children and youth as young soldiers in the struggle for liberation in South Africa
For 30 years, I have been involved in pioneering community education programmes, and conceptualising, funding, researching, designing, planning, implementing and evaluating various education initiatives in countries across the world, especially in my home country, South Africa. For 20 of these 30 years, my energies were expended on exploring the potential for appropriating digital technologies to enable equitable access to quality education for all, with social justice intent. For much of this time, I was traversing between big picture ‘strategic thinking’ and systems ‘transformation’ at global and national levels, and in implementing programmes and projects towards social justice goals ‘on the ground’. I wrestled with the dialectical relationship between thinking, talking and doing; and the relationship between the technical world of words and measurement and the political goals towards social justice. I worked as a United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) technical advisor on information and communication technologies (ICT) in Education in the national Department of Basic Education for four years before I embarked on my PhD journey.

These years left me deeply troubled by an unabated debilitating crisis in public schooling that disadvantages the vast majority of children and the lack of impact of the many digital learning initiatives, for some of which I have been responsible.

A discussion with Professor Nicky Roberts in 2016, about her work in Vrygrond\(^2\) on building community through family mathematics and storytelling with children in the foundation phase of schooling, linked to similar work by Olico\(^3\) in Diepsloot, inspired me towards the themes in this thesis. It triggered my own memory of establishing a Primary Schools Tuition Programme in the Bo Kaap\(^4\) community in the early 1980s and how the focus was on children and their families. I have always understood that social justice work takes place ‘on the ground’. The direct engagement with children living at society’s margins, was the missing perspective in my work on digital learning. I needed to embark on an ethnographic journey with township children from whom the bigger system needs to understand their everyday learning lives, with their families, friends and communities. This decision was

\(^2\) Vrygrond is Afrikaans for ‘free ground’ and is one of the oldest informal housing settlements in the Western Cape (von Kotze, 2014)

\(^3\) Olico is a non-government organisation based in Diepsloot, one of Johannesburg’s fastest growing post-apartheid townships, who run mathematics tuition programmes. (Olico Foundation NPC, 2018)

\(^4\) Bo Kaap is Afrikaans for ‘above the Cape’. It is a former township situated above the Cape Town city centre, on the slopes of Signal Hill (Bassadien, 2017).
reinforced by Professor Elizabeth Henning at an event celebrating the 10th anniversary of Funda Ujabule, a primary school in Soweto linked to the University of Johannesburg, in 2017: “We don’t know our children”.

Enter the Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) results for 2016 report (Howie et al., 2017). It revealed that 78 per cent of Grade 4 children cannot read for meaning in any language. It also revealed that boys were performing worse than girls which appeared to be an emerging pattern when compared to results of PIRLS in previous years. It further revealed that 42 per cent of Grade 4 children reported that they were bullied weekly, making South Africa the country with the highest reported incidences of bullying compared to 49 other countries. The clamour that these results unleashed about the depth of a learning crisis in South Africa and globally, was cause for huge concern (Aitchison, 2018). Where were the digital learning evangelists in this learning crisis conversation? How could the results of one test influence an ocean of opinion about the deficits characterising South Africa’s children? Which narrative were missing from these conversations? Which narratives need to be surfaced? These were the questions that led me to this thesis.

The PIRLS results and its particular reference to a pattern of boy underperformance in reading and literacy, triggered my memory of an influential book that in my days as a youth activist, became the basis for an alternative reading programme in the Primary Schools Tuition Programme in Bo Kaap. It was entitled Letter to a Teacher (The Schoolboys of Barbiana, 1970) and it was written by eight boys from a town in Tuscany, Italy. They address their teacher through the use of a collective ‘I’, about their experiences of failing at school and their critique of the system that does not know their names. The Schoolboys of Barbiana (1970), inspired me to find the stories of the schoolboys like the ones referred to in the PIRLS report.

Thus, the I in this thesis comes from a long history of sensitivity to the conditions of those who are often marginalised, who need to be seen and whose voices need to be heard. At the same time, as researcher, the ‘I’ is also someone who is aware of my own power, privileges and vulnerabilities and whose intention it is to manage these mindfully on my PhD research journey. Most profoundly, the I is Kabelo, a boy brimming with skills and talents, whose wings are clipped by the formal
education system, which, despite the best of intentions, misrecognises his capabilities. In my account of his playworld, I show how he flaps his ‘still-wet’ wings, and flies.
1.1 Introduction

“Every child is a national asset.”

For all children to be a national asset, their voices, agency and capabilities need to be systemically recognised. This thesis provides a rich ethnographic portrait of one South African national asset, a ten-year-old Soweto boy called Kabelo. It compares and contrasts his everyday world of play with his world of academic performance in which he is ostensibly underperforming. The study’s main argument is the that township boychild’s everyday experience is predominantly a play experience. For him, play is his way of being and his world is predominantly a playworld. However, Kabelo’s play, play tools and play capabilities are systemically misrecognised in his world of academic performance. The study argues that his everyday play, play tools and play capabilities should be considered a critical register and mode of self-making that warrants socially-just recognition within the formal education system.

The study is a response to the absence of voice and participation of children in national and global conversations and decision-making about them. It is also a response to a dominant deficit narrative about academically-underperforming children growing up in an increasingly unequal society in a digital era. It proposes an alternative, empowering narrative focused on systemically recognising the children, not for that which they are not able to do, but for that which they can, and which they are capable of, and that which they know and learn in everyday life.

The thesis is also a response to the observation that “we have very few post-liberation ethnographies of everyday life in the township” (Mbembe, Diamini, & Khunou, 2004, p.499). It assumes the form of a narrative within a narrative by offering a critical ethnographic storied portrait of everyday life of a township boy.

The plot of this research tale begins with an exposition that includes the background to the research, the research problem, and motivation for the research. In

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5 A rallying slogan of the South African Government’s Department of Basic Education, restated by the State President’s address to the January 2019 basic education sector workshop (Ramaphosa, 2019)
setting the scene and observing the rising action in the research tale, it locates the study within the extant literature; it outlines its conceptual and theoretical orientation and research design. Kabelo’s ethnographic narrative portrait, serves as the climax of the research tale, while its denouement interprets and analyses the findings and the conclusion, which aims at bringing resolution to the research narrative. The structure of this narrative within a narrative is demonstrated in Figure 1.1

![Figure 3.1 The research study as a narrative](image)

1.2 Exposition: background, research problem and motivation

The background to the research narrative begins with the dominant conversations on reading performance of Grade 4 children in South Africa. For more than a decade, along with consistently low scores in national and cross-national reading tests, a pattern of boy underperformance relative to girls, have emerged in South Africa (Broekhuizen & Spaull, 2017). This gendered pattern is echoed globally, as evidenced by the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in which 48 out of 50 participating countries reflected lower reading scores for boys compared to girls (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Hooper, 2017). That South Africa ranked
among the worst-performing countries in PIRLS, with 78 per cent of Grade 4 learners reportedly not being able to read for meaning, lent further credibility to a growing, deficit narrative on the country’s education system. For some education system influencers, the PIRLS results epitomized a systemic learning crisis (World Bank, 2017), a boy crisis (Farrell, 2018) and in South Africa, a cognitive catastrophe (Aitchison, 2018), reflecting a cognitive wasteland (Spaull, 2019).

While it acknowledges the diagnostic insights that assessments and test score data reveal about South African learners, albeit limited (Kanjee & Moloi, 2017), this study’s contribution troubles the analytic gaze that is focused primarily on the generalised performative discourse in the testing data. It argues that within these conversations, the worldview and everyday lived experience of the ostensibly underperforming township boychild is invisible and his\(^6\) voice is inaudible. Such invisibility and inaudibility places the child at risk of stigmatisation and marginalisation and can contribute to the persistent inequality in education and society as analysed most recently by Spaull and Jansen (2019). In troubling this dominant analytical gaze, my research interest is with knowledge production that makes visible the voices and everyday play of the reading-challenged township\(^7\) boychild at the centre of the ‘cognitive catastrophe’ (Aitchison, 2018) conversation. Contributing towards an alternative narrative, I set out to produce knowledge with the participation of the reading-challenged boychild, about his experience with reading and how this compares with way he constructs his everyday world of play, in his voice. At the same time, I acknowledged the limits of full participation of child participants in research (Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011).

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\(^6\) Because of the playworld and academic performance world of the township boychild is the unit of analysis of this study, I use the male pronoun throughout this study.

\(^7\) A township in South Africa, refers to physically-bounded geographical spaces that were reserved for black people during Apartheid (1948-1994). Today they are spaces where mostly impoverished, predominantly black, working-class and under-class communities.
1.2.1 Research problem: The misrecognition of the township boychild's playworld

Consistent with the main argument of this thesis, I show how the more dominant *homo economicus* culture and narrative related to academic performance, eclipses insight on the worldview and lived experiences of the township boychild, and his world of play. I argue that the latter are in fact invisible and misrecognised in the knowledge production system, the world of policy and practice focused on academic performance and homo economicus. I show how this argument is echoed by others who have studied the misrecognition of children and youth living and learning at the margins of society. I have problematised my research within theories of invisibility and misrecognition, following Fraser (2008) and I locate my scholarly contribution within a brief overview of the misrecognition literature.

The research problem highlights how there is a dearth of knowledge on the world as it is seen and experienced from the perspective of the child’s everyday experience, growing up in a post-apartheid, digital era and living in urban historically-black townships. I scope very briefly the existing literature on township children’s lifeworlds. I show however, that while some lifeworld studies of children have emerged in recent years few have addressed the everyday play of South African township children and how their lifeworld incorporates their digital world and their play-world. This knowledge gap and the under-theorising of the township boychild’s play, further reproduces the systemic misrecognition of his everyday world.

The research problem also highlights a gap related to the predominance of etic and nomothetic methodologies that are derived from positivist ontologies (Denzin, 2009). These are evident from diagnostic reports of national and cross-national standardised tests, systemic evaluations and further empirical evidence, based on randomised control trials. These methodologies presuppose that the child as learner and unit of analysis, is a neutral, ahistorical, apolitical data point which is reinforced in policy through, as also suggested by Henning (2014), the homogenising reference of the child as a ‘national learner’. In an attempt to highlight the way

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8 Homo economicus literally refers to Economic Man (sic!). The origins of the concept hails from the writings of John Stuart Mill and Adam Smith’s neo classical economics as a reference to humans as rational economic choice-makers and decision-makers, based on individual self-interest.
plurality, and differentiation manifest among children, a methodology that considers idiographic and emic perspectives, is required as well.

1.2.2 Motivation: The unknown ‘underperforming’ township boychild

The research was motivated by my interest, and the wish to contribute new knowledge about children’s play, offset by three dominant themes in South African and in global education research. The first is the reading and literacy crisis and boy underperformance (Howie et al., 2017). The second is the adoption of 21st century skills in South African government policy (Department of Education (DBE), 2004) and more recently, the promotion of fourth industrial revolution skills in national skills strategy and curriculum reform endeavours (Basic Education Parliamentary Portforlio Committee, 2018). Within the latter learner-centred learning (DBE, 2004, p19) is a key feature. The third deals with the emerging attention to learning through play and the depiction of play as joyful and pleasurable (Department of Basic Education, 2017). In doing so I am motivated to explore what may remain latent in our usual accounts – this lies in the realm of the ‘critical underneath’ (Nuttall, 2009) or sub-terrain. Within each of the three themes, the South African township child and his everyday playworld is largely unknown.

I have already mentioned how the everyday lived play experience of the reading-challenged boy as represented in underperformance statistics is invisible, because there are few studies that have foregrounded an understanding of children’s views and insights of their reading struggles. Several authors, such as Welkener and Baxter Magolda, (2014) have emphasised the value of understanding meaning-making by students when interpreting academic performance, while Busch, Jardine and Tjoutuku (2016) have proposed that there is value in language portraits for understanding the linguistic repertoire of individuals. Because few of these studies have been conducted with children living in South African townships, was motivated to shed some light on the township boychild’s meaning-making in relationship to his struggles with reading, literacy and languages in school.

Despite many claims of learner-centredness in digital learning, an understanding of the South African township learner and his naturalistic exposure to a digital world is also mostly unknown. Both ‘grey’ and academic research on digital learning confirm my twenty years of experience in this field which has not provided
much evidence that digital technologies contribute positively to improved learning, learner performance and, more broadly, the attainment of equity in education (Slavin, 2018; World Bank, 2017). In South Africa, such evidence remains mixed (Amory, Rahiman, & Mhlanga, 2015). This lack of conclusive evidence can also be attributable to the biases in digital learning and mobile learning research, towards systematic reviews (Crompton, Burke, & Gregory, 2017); theoretical modelling (Traxler, 2016; Sharples, et al, 2007), landscape reviews (Isaacs, 2012; West, 2012); and limited evaluations of m-learning interventions (Isaacs, Roberts, & Spencer-Smith, 2019). While these provide valuable macro and meso-level insights and perspectives, they tell us very little about the subjectivities of the township child as a learner born in a digital era. In other words, with much of the focus in policy narratives on learner-centred digital learning, limited attention has been placed on understanding who the ‘learners’ are for whom digital learning programmes are conceptualised. Moreover, young children are referred to as ‘users’, products or potential markets (Selwyn & Facer, 2013) in the dominant digital learning discourse.

Few attempts have been made to illuminate children’s subjectivities and digital diffusion in naturalistic settings, such as the study by Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) and Sharpe et al. (2016) on youth in the UK. Ethnographic studies by Sefton-Green and Erstad, (2009) of teenagers in Norway, Lemphane and Prinsloo (2014), Walton and Pallitt’s (2012) on children in Khayelitsha9 and Sibanda & Kajee (2019) offer further examples. My study is motivated by a need to build on these attempts by also providing a rich, nuanced insight into the way the encroaching digital world, including digital play (Edwards, 2013), manifests in the everyday lives of power-marginalised children.

With increasing interest in ‘learning through play’ in South Africa, (Department of Basic Education et al.,2019), there remains a paucity of knowledge about the child’s everyday play and the ways in which they make sense of the world. Phetluh's (2014) ethnographic study of Sepedi-speaking children’s game-play ranks among the few such studies. The research project for this thesis was motivated by the need to fill this critical gap.

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9 Khayelitsha is one of Cape Town’s largest and fastest growing black townships
1.3 Scene setting: research purpose, research questions and unit of analysis

This section describes the purpose of the research from which the research questions are derived. It also clarifies the study’s unit of analysis and hence the boundaries for the study

1.3.1 Research purpose: Comparing the township boychild’s everyday worlds of play and academic performance

Purpose is the controlling force in research. Decisions about design, measurement, analysis, and reporting all flow from purpose. Therefore, the first step in a research process is getting clear about purpose. (Patton, 2015 p.248)

Patton (2015) sums up clearly the centrality of the research purpose in guiding the research design and genres. This point has been reiterated by Carter and Little (2007) who show that there is an interactive relationship between a study’s choice of research design and genres and its research purpose, objectives and research questions. Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) advise on the need for qualitative researchers to articulate a clear purpose statement which should highlight why the study is being conducted and what the study hopes to accomplish. They use research purpose and research aims and objectives interchangeably, I have opted to use the term, research purpose. I acknowledge the guidance that Cresswell and Cresswell (ibid) provide on how to craft a substantive research purpose statement.

The research purpose for this study emerged from the framing of the research problem which highlights the invisibility of the township boychild’s capabilities (Biggeri, 2007) in his world of academic performance. Against this backdrop this study’s purpose is to challenge a prevailing vociferous deficit narrative, based largely on quantitative research focused on academic performance scores, by capturing critically, the township boychild’s everyday worlds of play and academic
performance. It seeks to understand, as ‘verstehen’\(^\text{10}\), who the township boychild is beneath his underperforming test scores, how he experiences his academic performance and how his world of academic performance compares and contrasts with his everyday world of play. The study aims to produce a critical ethnographic narrative portrait that

- Describes the township boychild beneath his ‘under-performing’ test scores;
- Captures specific ways in which he expresses his experiences with academic underperformance;
- Illuminates the way in which he makes meaning in his everyday world of play;
- Presents a description of his exposure to digital technologies; and
- Illicit from various data sources how his world of academic performance interacts with his world of play.

### 1.3.2 Research question: Who is the ‘underperforming’ township boychild?

Cresswell and Cresswell (2014) explain the centrality of the research question in defining the research problem and how its articulation provides insight into the nature of the issues that will be addressed. Research questions in qualitative research ask open questions about phenomena as they occur in situated context, in contrast with predetermined questions that serve to test a hypothesis (Stake, 2010). Stake (ibid) highlights further that the process of formulating and refining the research questions becomes a back and forth, iterative and evolving process. This process involves shifting from the question to the method and back to the question which leads to a refinement of the research question. This refinement process also influenced the eventual formulation of this research project which asks pertinently: who is the township boychild who is ostensibly under-performing academically? The related sub-questions that have guided this enquiry, are:

- How does he experience his academic performance?
- How does he make meaning in his everyday world of play?
- What is the nature of his exposure to digital technologies in naturalistic settings?

\(^{10}\) Verstehn is a German word which means knowing. It is also a reference to a tradition of knowing, from within as opposed to knowing through objective observation (Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, 2019).
• How does his world of academic performance compare and contrast with his everyday world of play?

Because the research questions are ‘who’ and ‘how’ questions, they are as Patton (2015) states, descriptive questions, intended to yield descriptive data, as opposed to causal questions seeking causal data. These research questions were informed by the following assumptions:

• That there are four eight-to-nine-year-old boys in Grade 2 at the Soweto primary school who have under-performed in mathematics and languages;
• That all four boys construct knowledge, meaning and values across various spaces at school and beyond sometimes with and sometimes without digital technologies;
• That they each have some degree of access to various forms of digital technologies which they use and appropriate with regularity;
• That they create, use and appropriate these digital tools artefacts and symbols to mediate various ways of learning; and
• That they are also confronted with risks associated with their embrace of digital technologies that potentially infringe on their privacy and security as children.

The research questions supported the refinement of a conceptual framework and the selection of appropriate research design genres and related data collection tools. They also informed the search terms that were applied in literature searches and they guided the criteria for establishing the sampling frame for this qualitative study.

1.3.3 Study sample and unit of analysis

The study population was the cohort of Grade 2 boys at an urban primary school in Soweto Johannesburg in 2017 who at the time, fell within the 8-to-9-year-old age range and they were turning 10 in 2018. Drawing on Trochim (2006), a purposive sampling strategy consistent with qualitative research based on the following
selection criteria, was applied when selecting a sample of boys as research participants. These include the following criteria:

- The boys were in Grade 2 in 2017 and were going to Grade 3 in 2018;
- They were 9 years after June 2017 when field work commenced;
- They could speak English;
- Their assessments during their schooling in the Foundation Phase reflect 'under-performance' in general and in languages and mathematics as defined in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for the Foundation Phase and related policy documents (Department of Basic Education, 2011a).

In the initial phases of the study, the focus was on four underperforming township boy-children. As the study progressed, I decided to conduct an in-depth study with one of the four boys, pseudo-named Kabelo. While each of the four boys presented unique insights into their respective playworlds, I was most intrigued by Kabelo. This prompted me to follow a process of theoretical sampling, as explained by Charmaz (2014, p192) which I clarify further in Chapter 4. In this way, the study transitioned from an initial study of four boys, to one that focuses primarily on the playworld and academic performance world of one boy.

The two worlds of Kabelo, his world of play and his world of academic performance and how they interact, served as the unit of analysis for this study. The unit of analysis is the entity that a research study is based on that will be analysed. It frames the scope and boundary of the study. In this study, clarity on the unit of analysis provided enabled clear parameters to be set for the review of related literature and conceptual framework for this research. It also guided the research design and the development of research instruments for data collection and analysis. Trochim (2006) states that the analysis that a research endeavour intends to conduct, determines its unit of analysis.
1.3.4 Clarifying the study’s boundaries

This study’s multi-faceted research topic intersects with childhood studies (Bessant, 2014), media studies (incorporating studies on new media (Buckingham, 2006), digital technologies and digital learning (Selwyn, 2014)), studies of boyhood and gender (Gee, 2015) as well as cultural studies and multiliteracies research (Connery, John-Steiner, & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010). Methodologically the study is governed by the behavioral science disciplines: sociology, anthropology and psychology.

Based on clarifying the research problem, its purpose, and unit of analysis define the scope and boundaries of the study. To illuminate the latter, I also clarify what the study does not cover. This study is not a South African township boychild version of the classic text: Why Johnny Can’t Read (Flesch, 1955). It does not seek to decipher and clarify the nature of the literacy and reading challenges faced by multilingual township children. It is also not a response to the ‘reading wars’ (Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018) that have been taking place in South Africa and elsewhere. It does not seek to contribute to current debates about language and early literacy and approaches to literacy and reading acquisition as articulated in the Mont Fleur Statement (Aitchison et al., 2015).

Moreover, while the study has been informed by the emergent pattern of boy underperformance, it does not seek to analyse the reasons for boy underperformance relative to girls. These have been explored by others such as Hartley and Sutton (2013) who challenge what they call the ‘universalism’ associated with boys’ underachievement in schools in London and they analyse academic performance in relation to the interplay between masculinities and social and class reproduction in the family and at school. Moreau (2011) situates the ‘boys underperformance debate’ within the contrasting national conversations and policy contexts in France and the UK while (Cobbett & Younger, 2012) clarifies the underachievement of boys in the Caribbean within broader conversations of political and economic marginalisation.

Furthermore, the study does not provide analysis on masculinities and boyhood, nor is it a study about the identities of the township boys involved in this study. In South Africa, children’s identities and the identity struggles of boys and
black boys in particular have also been widely analysed by Bhana (2005; 2008) and Bhana, de Lange, and Mitchell (2009). Mayeza (2017) has also researched more recently, young children’s construction of social identities and the relationship between play and gender identity construction. While acknowledging these contributions, this thesis touches on limited aspects of gender identities within the boundaries of the boychild’s daily lived experience in his world of play.

Thus, by clarifying the issues that the study does not seek to address, enables the creation of clear and tight boundaries within which the scope of this study falls. Next I turn to another scene-setting section of the research narrative, the substance of which is the conceptual framework and literature review.

1.4 Conceptual framework and literature review

A social justice orientation that accentuates Fraser’s (2008) three-dimensional model of social justice with the ‘capabilities approach’ (CA) propounded by Sen (2005) and Nussbaum (2002), serves as the guiding framework for this thesis. Fraser’s (ibid) three-dimensional model includes redistribution, recognition and representation. The first dimension, redistribution, is a response to maldistribution of resources and highlights the importance of redistribution (the what) in her model. The second dimension includes recognition (the who) which is a response to misrecognition as an analytic construct. The third dimension of her social justice model highlights the limits of political participation - which is why she emphasises the centrality of representation (the how).

1.4.1 Social justice theories on misrecognition, recognition and capabilities

For this thesis, the emphasis is on the notions of recognition and misrecognition. According to Fraser (2008), misrecognition provides a basis to identify and analyse diverse forms of invisibility and marginalisation as they are experienced by individuals in ways that are endemic and systemically institutionalised. These experiences are felt beyond just their lack of rights and access to material resources (Fraser, ibid). In response, recognition refers to the way an individual is seen and acknowledged reciprocally as an equal by other individuals, institutions and systems. Fraser (ibid) shares this aspect of recognition with that
espoused by Taylor (1994) and Honneth (1996) for whom recognition is a vital human need and demonstrates worthiness of acknowledgement.

While Fraser provides a macro perspective of social justice, Sen’s (2005) and Nussbaum’s (2002) capabilities approach (CA) provide social justice insights from the perspective of the individual in context. CA illuminates the quality of life that individuals are capable of choosing. Sen (ibid) defines capability as the individual’s freedom, opportunities and choices to do what she or he considers to be valuable. Sen (ibid) and Nussbaum’s (ibid) reference is to the human capability to fulfil the essential quality of life functions. While the thesis adopts the CA as explained by Sen (ibid) and Nussbaum (ibid), it also shares the critique of CA by Roberts (2015) who highlight its limitations in acknowledging power relations within systems. For this reason, the thesis adopts activity systems analysis heuristic tool because it integrates the notion of asymmetrical relations of power within a given activity system which I explain later. In operationalising CA, Nussbaum (2000) establishes a universal list of core capabilities that are critical for human flourishing that can be specified further based on context. In South Africa for example, Walker (2006) identifies a provisional list of eight situated capabilities that were valued by secondary school girls for achieving gender equity in education, from which this study derives the idea of an ideal-theoretical list of children’s play capabilities.

1.4.2 Everyday knowledge, schooled knowledge, funds of knowledge and play

Because the study is about comparing the everyday world of play with the formal world of academic performance in the life of one boy, the debates in education about these concepts invariably surfaced during my sojourn through the literature. One of the areas of debate is about the nature and value of everyday knowledge in relation to formal schooled knowledge and how this relates to the child’s learning process in the context of curriculum reform (Hoadley, 2011). With shifts in the learning landscape catalysed by the affordances of digital technologies (Strigel & Pouzevevara, 2012), these debates have more recently included the relationship between learning and schooling (World Bank, 2018). The latter connects with the way present-day formal schooling acts as a barrier to children’s learning and creativity, as extolled by Robinson (2001, 2007, 2013). While making attempts to acknowledge the contestations about these concepts as they relate to this study, I try
both to clarify and provide boundaries for their use in ways that are congruent with the study’s purpose.

Gardiner (2006) provides a concise overview of the historical evolution and valorisation of the everyday and everyday knowledge(s), juxtaposed in relation to scientific and theoretical knowledge. He shows how the everyday was intertwined with scientific knowledge in pre-modern times but with the rise of modernity, the boundaries and separation starkened. Everyday knowledge became increasingly vilified and scientific knowledge gained credibility at the expense of everyday knowledge. In this context the likes of Agnes Heller (1975), Henry Lefebvre (1991) and Michel de Certeau (1980) highlighted everyday and its various knowledges as surfacing that which lie hidden and repressed so that daily life and life-worlds can be transformed. In this way, they elevate the everyday and related concepts such as ‘lived experience’ to the status of a critical concept (Gardiner, 2006). While noting these insights, my reference to ‘everyday’ in this thesis, stems from the theoretical construction of the spontaneous, everyday knowledge of children espoused by Vygotsky (1962; 1978; 1987).

In his work related to language, speech and thinking, Vygotsky introduced the notion of everyday concepts (which he originally called spontaneous concepts) that developed in dialectical relationship with scientific concepts (which he originally called non-spontaneous concepts) among children. He clarifies this conceptualisation of knowledge types in various texts: Thought and Language (1962), Mind and Society (Vygotsky, 1978); and Thinking and Speech (Vygotsky, 1987). With reference to their language development, spontaneous concepts are developed in everyday life during practical activity in the interaction by children with peers and adults. Spontaneous concepts are also contextually situated within their linguistic, social and cultural makeup and they progress from ‘bottom to top’, meaning children develop spontaneous concepts from their concrete everyday experience towards more general and abstract concepts. Moreover, for Vygotsky (1987) spontaneous concept development provides a foundation for the development of scientific concepts. He explains further that the relationship between everyday and scientific concepts is reciprocal in that they mediate each other. He distinguishes between scientific concepts that are necessarily taught, and everyday concepts that a child is able to learn from practical empirical experience. Moll (2014) uses the term
‘conceptual fabric’ to explain Vygotsky’s reference to the foundation that everyday concepts provide to develop scientific schooled concepts. Scientific concepts therefore grow into the everyday into the domain of personal experience thereby acquiring meaning and significance (Moll, 2014 p.35).

Because this study is also about the interactions between the township boychild’s world of everyday play and academic performance, it engages with concepts that relate to these interactions. I show how scholars of cognition and culture such as Lave, (1988), Rogoff (2014) and Heath (1982; 2012) have deepened an understanding of everyday cognition as everyday knowledge. I also show how children through peer cultures also develop working theories that support their child-led zones of proximal development, as explained by Hill and Wood (2019), invoking a well-known Vygotskian theory. Moreover, I utilise González, Moll, and Amanti’s (2005) theory on funds of knowledge as analytical construct that helps to clarify how children’s play as their everyday knowledge allow them to develop play capabilities that are integral to their funds of knowledge. I derived my explanation of children’ play and play capabilities from an amalgamation of play theories by Vygotsky, (1967); Piaget, (1962), Bruner, Jolly, and Sylva (1976). I show how children explore, make sense of, and create much of their world through play. To this, Huizinga (1949) adds that play is integral to the culture of being human. Moreover, in the 21st century, the child’s playworld is continually being infused with a digital world (Albrecht & Tabone, 2017). This digital world involves situated engagement with digital cultures mediated by socially-constructed digital tools, signs and symbols, the design, production and consumption of which are embedded and embodied in culture and disparate social relations (Feenberg, 2017).

The next scene-setting section explains my adoption of a hybrid of critical ethnography, narrative inquiry and portraiture.

1.5 A qualitative research design hybrid

The adoption of a social justice orientation of this thesis also aligns with the study’s embrace of standpoint epistemology (Harding, 2003; 1992). Standpoint epistemology challenges the notion of neutrality; it introduces partial objectivism and
produces knowledge from the perspective of power-marginalised individuals and communities.

The research was designed to explore qualitatively, who the township boychild is in his worlds of play and academic performance, and how they intersect in context. Qualitative research design enables rich, thick and deep descriptive understanding of how meaning is constructed from experience (Merriam & Tisdell 2016).

As a qualitative research endeavour, the research adopts a combination of strategies proposed by Creswell (2013). More specifically it employs critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996, Geertz, 1998; Andersen 1989) as a methodology which includes an approach to multi-sited ethnography (Gutierrez, 2014) or ethnography as a travelling practice (Clifford, 1992) and digital ethnography (Pink, 2016). These blend with narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connolly, 1990, 1991) and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997) which are applied as techniques to write up a critical ethnographic portrait of one of the under-performing boys, pseudo-named Kabelo. Kabelo is one of four under-performing township boy-children who were included in a purposefully selected sample for this study.

1.5.1 Qualitative methods of data collection

The study uses a range of qualitative data collection tools and strategies, aiming to capture a ‘slice of life’ in a ‘slice of time’ of Kabelo. These data collection strategies include document reviews; clinical and ethnographic interviews; focus group discussions; direct observation; and digital story-telling. The latter involved the use of mobile phones by each of the boys to support the story-telling of their daily lives.

These data collection strategies include document reviews; clinical and ethnographic interviews; focus group discussions; direct observation; and digital story-telling. The latter involved the use of mobile phones by each of the boys to support the story-telling of their daily lives. I customised Lambert's (2010) digital storytelling cookbook to support the digital storytelling needs of this research project within the boundaries of access to digital devices, content and data that the research subjects were provided. This meant that while they were provided with digital devices
to enable photographing and video-recording their stories, they were mainly able to use these offline and not via the Internet due to their limited access to data.

The research employed audio recordings of interviews and focus group discussions. It also captured field notes and recorded photographs and videos of participant observation activities. The latter includes classroom observations, observations during home visits and visits to other township sites. Each of the four boys also captured videos and photographs on the mobile phones that were given to them by the researcher. The research transcribed audio recordings of interviews and focus group discussions. It also transcribed video recordings of digital story-telling workshops, observations of activities at various sites and the video recordings that Kabelo captured on his mobile phone.

### 1.5.2 From data to portrait: grounded theory methodology

The voluminous data was analysed using constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014; Saldana, 2016). This process involves systematic, iterative coding, categorising and thematising the raw data as they emerged over time. The coding and categorising process involved interpretation and making inferences through inductive reasoning. The latter is influenced by the researcher’s understanding and judgements which are influenced by her positionality and subjectivities. From this data analysis process, key themes and concepts were composed, and from these, Kabelo’s portrait was written.

### 1.5.3 Activity systems analysis (ASA) as a heuristic tool

I explain briefly how third-generation cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) Engeström (1987; 1999; 2001; 2015) was employed as a methodological heuristic to analyse Kabelo’s portrait. Activity system analysis is derived from cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) Engeström (1987; 1999; 2001; 2015). ASA enabled an analysis of the child as subject and his everyday worlds of play and academic performance as two interacting activity systems that are linked dialectically and systemically with the social and cultural system in which he is situated. In ASA, object-oriented, socially-meaningful tool-mediated human activity is the basic unit of
analysis. By situating the child as subject within and between two interacting activity systems, I was also able to identify and analyse the dialectical contradictions within and between the boychild’s playworld and academic performance world that can open up prospects for the transformative expansion of both activity systems.

Next, I explain how I created a critical ethnographic narrative portrait of Kabelo, which represents the climax of the research tale.

1.6. A critical ethnographic narrative portrait

Kabelo’s portrait offers a small and thick ethnographic narrative of his under-studied playworld as a social justice project. I was guided by Geertz’s (1973) reference to Ryle’s (1968) notion of a ‘thick description’, providing rich textures to Kabelo’s portrait. Drawn from the work of Ryle (ibid), Geertz (op.cit.) proposes that thick descriptions are an interworked system of signs, that are semiotically mediated. In addition to the interworked system of signs, I added the tools and artefacts that mediate the human relations and object of Kabelo’s playworld and performance world.

Digital photographs produced by him and by me, digital videos produced by him and me, vivid imagery conjured up in text and voice data through the talk of Kabelo and those with whom he relates, were woven through each of the ten themes arising from the consolidated data and were represented within a Kabelo’s portrait as a narrative. I employed narrative techniques in the write-up of Kabelo’s portrait, along with the use of the narrative arc introduced by Gustaf Freytag (Irvine, 2014). I referred to each of the ten themes as *ten acts in a drama that make up Kabelo’s portrait*. I also captured Kabelo’s portrait aesthetically to reflect his everyday ‘zine’11 culture (Nuttall, 2008).

In the denouement and resolution of this study, I analysed Kabelo’s critical ethnographic narrative portrait by applying activity systems analysis. I explain how Kabelo’s portrait as a playworld activity system that interacts with his academic performance world as an activity system. I applied (Engeström and Sannino's (2011)

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11 Zine is derived from the word magazine and it is a reference to the hip, socially aware cultures among youth who interact with global and local influences. It is also a reference to a magazine format as a dynamic way to depict stories of people.
model of system contradictions to demonstrate how dialectical contradictions between and within both activity systems manifest as the systemic misrecognition of the boychild’s play capabilities which leads to forms of institutionalised inequality. On the basis of this analysis I propose that expansive transformation within and between both worlds, can be operationalised through the socially-just recognition of his play capabilities as being integral to his funds of knowledge.

1.7 The chapters of this thesis

The study structure aligns with the traditional American Psychological Association (APA) style for doctoral dissertations. I have added to this, the language of narrative structure. It includes six chapters. The exposition of the research narrative includes the first chapter which situates the study in context. It explains the study background, its research problem, the motivation for the study, the study’s research purpose and research questions. Chapter 2 forms part of the rising action of the research narrative. It includes the study’s theoretical and conceptual orientation and situates the thesis within current empirical reality as expressed in the extant literature.

Chapter 3 also forms part of the rising action of the research tale and includes an explanation of the research design choices that were made, such as its adoption of critical ethnography, narrative inquiry and portraiture. It also outlines the data collection strategies that were adopted. It also explains the adoption of activity systems analysis as a heuristic tool to analyse the critical ethnographic narrative portrait as two interacting activity systems within and between which are inherent dialectical contradictions. The approach to ethics in research with children and the researcher’s reflexivity is also clarified in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 demonstrates how the voluminous data was processed through the application of constructivist grounded theory, from which the 10 themes of an ethnographic portrait emerged. Chapter 5 provides a thick, rich and deep ‘zine’ display of a critical ethnographic narrative portrait in 10 dramatic acts. Chapter 6 interprets and discusses the study findings by applying activity systems analysis, including a methodology for clarifying dialectical contradictions within and between
two interacting activity systems. Chapter 6 also draws relevant research conclusions and reflects on the contribution made to research and usable knowledge and draws out the implication for future research.

1.8 Summary: the thesis statement

This chapter has provided an overview of the thesis. The research problem which this thesis seeks to address is reflected in my review of the extant literature on the academic performance world of school-going children. Through a social justice theoretical orientation, I demonstrate how an undertone of deficit-speak prevails when considering the large percentage of boy-children who are challenged with reading and literacy. I illustrate how an emphasis on a township boychild’s underperformance, his capabilities that are present in his everyday world of play, are unseen. I problematise the invisibility of the child’s play capabilities within an academic performance system of tools, rules, and disparate relations, as systemic misrecognition. I suggest that such systemic misrecognition is another form of inequality that is integrally linked to endemic structural inequities in South Africa’s education system. I presented the intersect of different research fields, which amalgamate in a ‘knowledge plea’ not only to better understand but to recognise the boychild’s play, play tools and play capabilities as a social justice imperative.

The main research question asks pertinently, who is the underperforming township boychild? The thesis offers a critical ethnographic narrative portrait of one underperforming township boychild pseudo-named Kabelo. Kabelo’s portrait reveals how his everyday lived experience is ‘predominantly a play experience, where play is his way of being, and his everyday world is predominantly a playworld. His playworld interacts with his world of academic performance. Applying a mediational and relational activity systems analysis heuristic, I illustrate how Kabelo’s academic performance world and playworld are two interacting activity systems. In this way, I propose that while there are similarities within and between these two interacting activity systems, there are also moments of dialectical contradictions that manifest as systemic misrecognition that are analytically distinct. Based on this analysis I propose that expansive transformation within and between both worlds can be operationalised through the socially-just recognition of his play capabilities that are
integral to his *funds of knowledge*. I propose a preliminary list of Kabelo’s play capabilities as a basis for further development of a list of children’s core play capabilities.

I intend to produce knowledge that is not only readable and cogent but also usable and which stands in contrast and potentially complementary to large-scale studies. I conclude with the need for more studies that illustrate the detail of the knowledges and capabilities of the Kabelo’s of the world.
2.1 Introduction: the recognition of children’s play capabilities

Human play theorists agree that young children create much of their world through play, and they explore and make sense of their world through play (Vygotsky, 1967; Piaget, 1962; Bruner, Jolly, and Sylva (1976). By extension, I propose that much of the child’s *lived experience* (Van Manen, 2015) of the world, is also a lived *play* experience (Huizinga, 1949). Through their lived play experience, the child develops play capabilities that are integral to his funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). However, it contends that dominant education scholarship, policy and practice, lose sight of the township child’s world as their playworld. Because higher structural value is placed on school-based academic performance premised on various tests and assessment instruments, the child’s playworld and play capabilities, are systemically misrecognised.

I adopt the construct of misrecognition as a form of structural and systemic invisibility as explained by Fraser (2008) and Fraser and Honneth (2003), and as interpreted by Boidy (2019). In this respect, I propose that systemic misrecognition is also a form of inequality and injustice that requires attention as that which is connected to other forms of inequality and injustice in the South African primary school system as shown by (Spaull, 2013). I also note the recent exposé on education inequality by Spaull and Jansen (2019) and suggest that the analysis on the misrecognition of the child’s play capabilities in the formal education system, presents another systemic dimension to the experience of inequality. The central proposition of this thesis is to counteract systemic misrecognition by enabling the recognition of the boychild’s play capabilities as a social justice project.

Social justice is thus, a central theoretical orientation of this study. I situate my adoption of a social justice lens against the backdrop of complex forms of persistent
structural inequality in post-apartheid South Africa. I adopt Fraser’s (2008) three-dimensional model of social justice (which incorporates redistribution, recognition and participation) and emphasise her theory of recognition. To operationalise Fraser’s theory of social justice and recognition, I adopt Sen (1999, 2005) and Nussbaum’s (2002, 2005) theories of human capabilities. Building on Nussbaum’s (2000) proposed list of core human capabilities, and I propose the development of a child’s list of play capabilities as a way to operationalise social justice in his playworld. Figure 2.1 provides a map of the topics that will be discussed next.

Figure 2.1 Map of chapter topics
First, I explain why social justice matters when exploring the world of play from the township boychild’s point of view.

2.2 Social justice and recognition

The enduring prevalence of deep-seated structural inequality in South Africa’s education system has been widely documented (Roberts, 2018, Taylor, van der Berg, Reddy, & Janse van Rensburg, 2015; Spaull, 2013) and more recently, Spaull and Jansen (2019). For some, it demands the critical prioritisation of social justice struggles in education (Tikly, 2011). Others go as far as suggesting that advancing social justice is fundamental for an equitable education system in South Africa (Robinson, 2016:21).

Badat and Sayed (2014) analyse succinctly how social justice objectives in education have been compromised in post-apartheid South Africa over time, due to a range of factors, including global pressures. They distinguish between a limited form of social justice, focused on racial redress and affirmative action, and more substantive social justice that challenges structural social and economic inequities (2014:128). Chisholm (2012) clarifies the complexity of social justice struggles in education since 1994, mainly based on challenging historical legacies of economic, social and cultural inequities. She highlights examples of continuing social justice struggles, such as a campaign for functional libraries in schools led by a non-government organisation, Equal Education. Within this, she also illuminates the nuances within these struggles over successive phases in the post-apartheid era. She concludes that the continuing racially-unequal learning outcomes, poor education quality and high unemployment make social justice and equality an essential clarion call.

While these are macro perspectives on why social justice struggles in education prevail in South Africa, others highlight the teacher development, service-learning and epistemological dimensions. Petersen and Henning (2018) provide a case study of the practice of service learning by student-teachers and reflect on their lack of conceptual understanding of social justice intent and underpinnings of service learning. Du Plooy and Zindile (2014) explore the concept of epistemological access
compared with institutional access in foundation phase education in South Africa, derived from Morrow (1994). They also review the differences between social justice, rights-based and human capital theories of educational change as explained by Tikly and Barrett (2011), and draw attention to the way epistemological access remains a social justice enterprise. Similar arguments are proposed by Morrow, (1994) and Henning 2012) who suggest that young children may have access to schools, but that knowledge-making opportunities, remain scarce.

While these scholars demonstrate why social justice struggles remain a priority in education, not all clarify the meaning of social justice as an analytical construct. Chipkin and Meny-Gibert (2013) show how definitions of social justice derive from Miller (1991), who points out that social justice as a construct has been applied differently by different people. Miller (ibid) suggests that one can pursue social justice struggles without identifying with it as a concept. In their attempt at defining the social justice sector in South Africa, Chipkin and Meny-Gibert (ibid) provide a brief historical overview of how the idea has been applied in South Africa, and adopt an operational definition, focused on the pursuit of justice in the fair distribution of economic, political and social benefits and burdens. They include specifically, a focus on economic justice, public participation and social cohesion (2013). Henning (2012), however, calls for classroom research that can pinpoint specific injustices in the practice of teaching.

Research in South Africa also contrasts social justice theories with theories of human capital development and rights-based theories. Human capital theories emphasise economic growth while a rights-based approach invokes the state as the ‘provider’ of fundamental human rights. Tikly and Barrett (2011) give a succinct critical analysis of rights-based and human capital theories and applications in education. They also show how social justice theories emanate from the capabilities approach espoused by Sen (1999, 2005) and Nussbaum (2002, 2005). They propose a way in which a capabilities approach, combined with Fraser’s (2008) social justice theory, can address the substantive political, social and cultural dimensions related to education quality. Against the backdrop of continuing inequitable access to quality education opportunities for many in post-apartheid South Africa, they suggest a three-dimensional model for the advancement of social justice in the quest for
quality education for everyone: an inclusion dimension, a relevance dimension and a democratic dimension.

I adopt Fraser’s (2008) three-dimensional model of social justice. Her model comprises dimensions of redistribution (the what), recognition (the who) and representation (the how). In doing so, I shine a spotlight on recognition as a dimension of social justice in relation to the other dimensions. I also make a connection between Fraser’s socially-just recognition and Sen (ibid) and Nussbaum’s (ibid) human capabilities approach. Later I show how Walker (2006) and Wilson-Strydom (2016) have applied the capabilities approach to the South African education context.

Table 2.1 provides a brief overview of social justice research in education. It identifies social justice theories from a system-level perspective, from an institutional and classroom teaching and learning perspective and the perspective of the individual. It also distinguishes between theories of social justice and observations and applications of social justice theories in education in South Africa.
Table 2.1 Brief overview of research on social justice in education

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<th>System Level</th>
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<td>Tikly &amp; Barret (2011)</td>
<td>Social justice &amp; quality education</td>
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2.2.1 Recognition, social justice and children’s agency

Fraser (2008) argues that the dominant theories of justice have been historically informed by what she calls a Westphalian-Keynesian model that focused primarily on the redistribution of economic resources. This model emerged and became dominant, particularly after the second world war, when Keynesian welfarism was the prevailing economic model. Here Fraser particularly critiqued models of distributive justice expounded by Rawls (1999). For her, the Rawlsian model missed analyses of cultural and political dimensions, which are analytically distinct from economic-distributive constructs. She proposes, in addition to redistribution, the
concepts of recognition and representation that incorporate social justice underpinnings in the cultural and political spheres, respectively. In doing so, she opens up a view on multi-faceted dimensions of the way inequality and oppression are experienced.

Fraser continues by saying that, in the same way, that distribution relates to who is entitled to resources, recognition relates to whose attributes and capabilities are regarded by society as valuable. Recognition as a component of this social justice model encourages questioning about the ‘who’ in social justice and ‘who should count’ (2008, p197). Here, the ‘who’ is a reference to those who are not seen and who do not count. Highlighting recognition as a distinct analytic construct compels attention to experiences of inequality and marginalisation in daily life. This notion of the ‘who’ is also consistent with the research question for this thesis, which asks, with social justice intent, who the under-performing township boychild is.

The term recognition stems from the notion of misrecognition as an analytic construct for the phenomenon of injustice. Fraser (2009, p5) states that the form that socially-just recognition assumes depends on the nature of the misrecognition that has to be redressed. Fraser further accentuates that recognition refers to the way individuals are seen and acknowledged reciprocally as an equal by other individuals, by an institution, and by a system. She concur with this aspect of recognition as espoused by Taylor (1994) and Honneth (1996). Taylor (ibid) views recognition as a vital human need, and Honneth (ibid) argues that recognition may be compared to the German word annerkennung, which alludes to someone recognising another as being worth something or being worthy of acknowledgement. Honneth (ibid) and Taylor (ibid) also consider recognition to be an overarching moral category from which the economic distributive dimensions are derived. Fraser (2008) believes, however, that recognition is not subordinate to the redistributive aspects of social justice, but that it is equally fundamental and connected to redistribution and representation. For Fraser (op.cit) socially-just representation matters when individuals and communities do not have political voice and whose ability to participate meaningfully in decision-making are compromised or denied.

Fraser’s (ibid) recognition theory has been challenged by Honneth (1996) for distinguishing distributive and recognition dimensions of social justice. Fraser (ibid)
argues, though, that these need to be seen as analytically distinct, although (empirically) connected in that social justice is attained through the integration of all three dimensions. She also criticised Honneth’s (psychologically-informed) individualisation, which stems from a psycho-analytic perspective about self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect (Fraser, 1997).

I see value in the epistemological lenses, which Fraser (2008), Taylor (1994) and Honneth (1996) utilise. I agree with Fraser’s political and cultural focus on recognition as a distinct analytical category. I also concur with Taylor (ibid) and Honneth’s (ibid) ethical theorisation of recognition as a basic human need as well. The emphasis on agency (Honneth, 1996), derived from Giddens (1994), is also supported and will be discussed later as it relates to human capabilities. For Giddens (ibid), structures in the form of laws, rules institutions can enable or constrain human action and that for humans to ensure that these structures operate in their best interest, they need to be able to exercise their agency.

From Honneth’s (1996) viewpoint, agency includes and extends beyond individual change or transformation and includes broader institutionalised and societal influences. From a child’s everyday lived experience, agency would include their capabilities to navigate their roles, how they see themselves, their peers, and adults, and the social and cultural dynamics of their institutions and systems within which these are embedded.

2.2.2 Misrecognition and injustice

Fraser (1997) views misrecognition as a construct that shifts the analytical gaze towards the experience of invisibility, inequality, disadvantage, exclusion, marginalisation and powerlessness. These are experienced in ways that are both explicit and implicit, overt and subtle and find expression in ways that are internalised among individuals and communities. Misrecognition is structurally and systemically manifest also as lived experiences in institutions and systems. The (lived) experiences reach beyond (only) people’s lack of rights and lack of access to material resources. Fraser (ibid) refers to the lack of access to resources as ‘economic maldistribution’. However, she wanted to make a clear analytic distinction between resource maldistribution and misrecognition - even though, she argued, that
they are also reciprocal. She considers the experience of misrecognition as an injustice because it obstructs full participation in institutionalised systems, which has a bearing on how resources are accessed.

[To be misrecognised is] to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction and prevented from participating as a peer in social life- not as a consequence of a distributive inequity (such as failing to receive one's fair share of resources or "primary goods"), but rather as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem (Fraser, 1997, p.280).

Several education researchers have applied Fraser's (2008; 1997) theory of misrecognition in different ways aiming to contribute to social justice conversations in education in South Africa. Bozalek (2011) used the concept to theorise the participation disparity among children in the early grades in South African schools. Soudien (2006) argues that misrecognition also manifests in the use of homogenising language in scholarship and policy communities and that it fails to account for the diversity among children and more importantly for who they are. Soudien (2006) illuminates this point thus:

The learning-subject – the young student as invoked in the [South African Schools] Act- is defined in terms of middle-class singularity. Formally the Act describes the young person not as a student or a pupil, but significantly as a learner. This learner is ‘any person receiving or obliged to receive education’ (SASA, 1996:4). This definition gives the very diverse group of young people in South Africa a singularity and a unity that does not encapsulate who they are. (Soudien, 2006 p.11-12)

In agreement with Soudien’s view, Carrim (2011) challenges the use of homogenising concepts such as ‘learners’ in official education policy in South Africa. He shows how such concepts enable specific modes of participation in schools and fail to differentiate children from diverse backgrounds in terms of class, ‘race’, gender, language, and family circumstances. Policies and laws, furthermore, do not provide an adequate depiction of the many and varied realities experienced by South African children. This view is echoed by Henning (2014) when she states that the curriculum assumes the existence of a ‘national learner’, a national child when in
reality substantial differentiation prevails among South African children nationally. For Carrim (2011), in this way, children are misrecognised in education policy in the failure to recognise differences and diversity, which, I argue, contributes to marginalisation and disempowerment. He also highlights inconsistencies in policy, with the limits of children’s representativity in formal school governance legislation compared to curriculum policy that considers learners as active participants. In the Children’s Act (Republic of South Africa, 2005), however, which falls outside the ambit of education policy, the diversity of children’s circumstances and experiences are recognised.

Adopting a ‘spatialised learning’ concept, Fataar and Du Plooy (2012) describe how, based on their 10-month observation of four Grade 6 learners in a Western Cape township, their ‘learning positionings’ were misrecognised by the formal school and classroom pedagogies. Fataar (2018) also used the concept to explain the positioning of the educational practices and pathways of power-marginalised students in schools and universities in South Africa.

Much of the conversation on misrecognition in the South African education scholarship emerged during the student struggles at South African universities between 2015 and 2018. Bozalek and Boughey (2012) used the term to explain the disposition of disadvantaged and power-marginalised students at universities. Godsell and Chikane, (2016) applied the concept in their documentation of the roots of the ‘fees-must-fall’ movement and the involvement of student, worker and academic communities at South African universities. Fataar (2018b) explains how the concept illuminates the systemic and institutionalised discourses of exclusion, particularly for black students. It manifests as the misrecognition of who the students are and how they experience university life.

Misrecognition has also been described in other parts of the world. Ingram, (2009) wrote about the misrecognition of working-class culture of the boys in her qualitative case study of boys attending two schools in Belfast, Ireland. Burke, Crozier, and Misiaszek (2016) highlight the importance of developing appropriate pedagogical practices in higher education in the face of complex experiences of inequality and misrecognition by marginalised students. They draw on studies conducted in a range of countries, including California in the US, England, Italy,
Portugal and Spain and highlight inclusionary pedagogical practices to widen participation.

Thus, the extant literature reveals misrecognition as the many and varied, individual, institutionalised and systemic ways in which inequality, oppression and marginalisation are experienced. The concept also provides a lens to surface the subtleties with which discrimination and injustices are experienced. These manifestations of marginality would require explicit and detailed record so that they can be addressed as part of a socially-just recognition project.

2.2.3 Recognition of children's capabilities

While Fraser (2008) provides a macro perspective of social justice, Sen (1999, 2005) and Nussbaum (2002; 2005) argue for the recognition of human capabilities as they manifest in the situated condition of the individual. Robeyns (2003, p65) shows how, although this approach is normatively and ethically individual, it is not ontologically individualistic in the neoliberal sense - as also explained by Walker (2006).

Sen (1999, 2005, 2007) and Nussbaum (2000; 2002; 2005) developed the ‘human capabilities’ view of social development in critical response to the view of economic wealth and human rights as the dominant measures of development and prosperity (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). They emphasise that the wellbeing of individuals matters more to human development than economic growth and human rights. They argue that for people to flourish and ‘be well’ in society, they must be capable of choosing how they can prosper in society. To be capable of choice is thus a central tenet of their model of development.

Sen (2005) defines capability as the individual’s freedom, opportunities, and choices to do what is considered valuable. When a society strives towards justice, it embraces the freedom for people to live the life that they value, and they have freedom to choose. Nussbaum (2000;2005) adopts the capabilities approach from a feminist perspective and also highlights issues of justice, freedom and quality of life. Sen (ibid) explains further that capabilities include ‘functionings’ which are outcomes that individuals achieve when they can choose and value their wellbeing. Such functionings are essential ‘quality of life’ functions such as feeding themselves, being healthy, having a good job and being safe.
In operationalising the capabilities approach, Nussbaum (2000) establishes a
generic list of ten core capabilities that are critical for human flourishing that she
believes, can be further specified, based on any given situation. Her attempt at such
a ‘universal’ list of core capabilities was opposed by Sen (2004) because critical
dimensions of capabilities rest on the participation and engagement of individuals in
determining their capabilities. Sen (ibid) also believed that capabilities-formation is
informed by the situated conditions of individuals. Nussbaum’s (ibid) proposal about
the development of capabilities lists, continues to raise debates about
operationalising social justice. Robeyns (2003) also argues against a definitive
capabilities list and instead offers a procedure for their identification and development
of a contextually-relevant capabilities list. Kleine (2010, 2013) developed and applied
a choice framework in operationalising the capabilities approach that incorporates

- different degrees of empowerment;
- constitutive elements of structure such as institutions, discourses, policies,
  laws and technologies;
- the enactment of agency based on 11 elements such as educational
  resources, psychological resources; and
- development outcomes as achieved functionings.

Zelezny-Green (2018) expanded Kleine’s (2013) model of a capabilities
approach to the study of Kenyan schoolgirls and their after-school use of mobile
phones. She included the personal characteristics of individuals (age, gender, ability)
linked to their agency, and the role of intermediaries such as parents, in the lives of
children, as part of her girl-centred choice framework. Her study found that the
personal characteristics of the girls, such as age and gender, and their relationship
with their parents as intermediaries, were influential in framing their agency to
appropriate mobile phones after school. Expanding on the application of a
capabilities orientation to education, Biggeri and Mehrotra (2011) apply it to children’s
well-being and provide a capabilities list accordingly. Similar to Walker (2006), they
also developed capabilities lists in collaboration with children and provided a process
whereby children participated in their choice-making and collaborative design of
capabilities that they value. Their work is consistent with the view that children have
agency and should be given the freedom of choice. These lists are attempts at
operationalising the capabilities approach by valuing, evaluating and measuring
human capabilities for wellbeing (Nussbaum, 2000), for child wellbeing (Biggeri & Mehrotra, 2011) and in education (Walker, 2006; Wilson Strydom 2016).

While I accentuate the capabilities approach with Fraser’s (2008) theory of socially-just recognition, I share the critique by Roberts (2015) that the capabilities approach is weak on surfacing power disparities. To address this shortcoming, the thesis situates the child’s playworld and his play capabilities within an activity systems analysis (ASA) heuristic, that surfaces disparate relational, mediational and semiotic dimensions and tensions within a child’s playworld. I elaborate in more detail on how I apply ASA methodologically in Chapter 3.

In a section of this chapter (par. 2.4.3), I elaborate on the development of capabilities lists and how these can inform the development of a preliminary list of children’s play capabilities. These examples provide insight into how the capabilities and choice frameworks can operationalise socially-just recognition. The playworld, as viewed by the township boychild, is the substance of the next section.

2.3 The township boychild’s playworld

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), and the South African Children’s Act (Republic of South Africa, 2005), legally, a child is any person under the age of 18. In these documents, the ‘child’ is defined in legal terms as one who has formal rights. Often, however, despite the prevalence of formal rights, the ‘child’ is conceived of as an immature miniature adult or adult-in-training, who cannot make choices. This notion has been challenged by Bessant (2014) who argues that children are capable of making choices and decisions if they are provided with the relevant information and support. Moreover, James, Jenks, and Prout (1998) state that a child is not an incomplete subject or human ‘becoming’ as opposed to a human ‘being’. Instead, the child is, as Uprichard (2008) remarks, both a human being and human becoming. He is also a playful child who is capable of making choices, judgements and decisions, and who can act with agency and freedom (Biggeri, Ballet, & Comim, 2011). Children also learn to take responsibility for the choices they make and how they employ their agency – if given opportunities to do so at home and school. For example, Hilppö, Lipponen, Kumpulainenand Virlander (2016) studied nine to ten-year-old children in Finland and how they reflected on their everyday lives, based on photographs that they had
taken. They found that children had different accounts of agency that manifested in their aspirations, beliefs and competencies. Barton and Tan (2010) studied low-income youth aged 10 - 14 years in the USA inquiring into how they asserted themselves as community science experts. Ballet, Biggeri and Comim (2011) argue that that child is (already) social actors before they become adults, while Grindheim (2017) proposes that the child is also a playing citizen who has rights and agency, irrespective of the socio-economic status or place of living.

2.3.1 The township child

A township or *kasi*,¹² in South Africa, has been conceptualised not only as physically-bounded geographical space, reserved for black people during apartheid. Townships served as urban reserves of black labour for burgeoning manufacturing industry and were designed as spaces of apartheid control over the movement of people classified as black, across South Africa (Findlay & Ogbu, 2011). They are also identified as spaces designed for political and socio-economic oppression and were characterised by struggles against poverty and political marginalisation. Urban geographers have, however, suggested that during and after apartheid historically-black townships are entangled social and political spaces (Hart, 2002) where fluid global and local cultures converge to shape the way township lives are lived and schooled, conditioned by complex power relations (Nuttall, 2009). Today, townships are a reference to spaces where mostly impoverished, predominantly black, working-class and under-class communities reside compared with more affluent mixed communities in the suburbs (Jürgens, Donaldson, Rule, & Bähr, 2013).

The boychild who is the leading participant of this study lives in a historically-black township. More specifically though, this thesis is about a boychild who lives in Soweto, an acronym for ‘South Western Township’. It is situated to the southwest of central Johannesburg, separated by industrial areas and, very prominently, by the huge ‘mine dumps’ which are massive hills of yellow soil that was excavated from the mines and brought to the surface in the heyday of gold-mining. Soweto is one of the largest townships on the outskirts of Johannesburg. At the time of the last South African Household Census in 2011, Soweto had a population 1,271,628 of whom 98.5 per cent were classified as Black African, and one per cent was classified as

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¹² Kasi is derived from lokasie, an Afrikaans word which is a colloquial reference to black township.
‘Coloured’\(^{13}\). Soweto had 355 351 households. 9.3% of its residents aged over 20 years had a higher education, 55% had piped water inside their dwelling, while 93% had electricity for lighting, and 91% had access to a flush toilet connected to a sewerage system (Statistics South Africa, 2012). Nuttall and Mbembe (2008) describe Johannesburg as a rapidly-growing and ever-changing \textit{Afropolis}. The neologism, \textit{Afropolis} symbolises the ‘African modern’ which, according to the authors is a specifically modern way of being in a globalising city that has its roots in a racialised, colonial past.

Several lifeworld studies about South African township children and youth have utilised empowerment constructs in attempts to counteract deficit narratives. Based on an ethnographic enquiry of the life of one black teenage boy, pseudo-named Fuzile Ali, Fataar, (2010) describes how his aspiration towards a successful educational life drove him to harness his everyday knowledge and growing street smartness. His street know-how steered him through adversity in migration from an impoverished Eastern Cape township through various marginalised social spaces in the Western Cape.

Various authors have applied Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of \textit{habitus} or as Burawoy (2012) calls it, ‘\textit{homo habitus}’, to depict the lifeworld of children and youth living at the margins. Joorst (2015) employs ‘habitus’, ‘field’ and ‘capital’ as heuristics to analyse the resilience of five black, poor, working-class Grade 11 youth in a rural township in the Western Cape, whom he had observed over 18 months. He describes how each of the five youth is ‘self-schooled’ in how they display their aspiration, their religion-inspired hope, and their imaginativeness. Domingo-Salie (2018) applied the notion of ‘translocating habitus’ in her study of four historically disadvantaged youth attending a middle-class Focus School\(^{14}\) in Cape Town and how they navigated the spaces in and between these often-conflicting environments. Others have applied the concept of cultural capital and community cultural wealth to show how families draw on their various cultural assets to support students’ schooling lives. For example, Sonamzi, (2018) reported on his qualitative study about

\(^{13}\) Black African and Coloured are apartheid-defined racial categories as spelt out legislatively in the \textit{Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950} (SA History Online, 2015)

\(^{14}\) A Focus School is a public school that provide education with specialised focus on talent, including sport, performing arts or creative arts in Grades 10 to 12 (Department of Basic Education, 2015, p.1)
the domestic practices of four students in their family settings in a Western Cape township context.

I concur with the social justice-inspired orientation of these studies in their challenge to address the decontextualised neutral depiction of marginalised children and youth. They showcase and provide evidence that the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1986) of children and youth, particularly those living under conditions of resource-poverty and social exclusion, who possess ‘funds of knowledge’ (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), are not recognised. They also show that their cultural capital (Bourdieu, ibid) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) are unrecognised and that their capacities to aspire (Appadurai, 2004), are not acknowledged. They further show that children and youth mobilised religion capacity, imagination for problem-solving, and, also, *dark funds of knowledge* (Zipin, 2009), to navigate their often-precarious everyday lives.

However, these aspects of the lives of learners (children and youth) and their learning contexts have remained misrecognised and are, therefore, not integrated into the curriculum and formalised education pedagogies. To add to this body of lifeworld studies, I illuminate the play-centred nature of the township child, whose world I depict as a playworld. I compare and contrast the child’s playworld with his world of academic performance, and I highlight these experiences from the perspectives of a township boychild’s everyday experience. I explain my use of the boychild, as a construct, next.

### 2.3.2 The township boychild

Because the unit of analysis of this study foregrounds the playworld of ‘the underperforming township boychild’, it is also critical of the way an emerging global pattern of boy academic underperformance relative to girls, has been theorised. The dominant theories focus on essentialist notions of a ‘boy crisis’ (Husain & Millimet, 2009), a crisis of masculinity and boy disadvantage (Martino & Kehler, 2006), thereby creating a moral panic, reinforcing gender stereotypes and traditionalist binary notions of gender. These analyses have suggested that all boys are lumped into one monolithic category (Griffin, 2016). This view has also led to specified boy-friendly practice interventions, including calls for the re-masculinisation of the curriculum (Hodgetts, 2010).
I made a deliberate choice to explore the everyday world of a township boychild because it is being informed by the pattern of academic underperformance by boys relative to girls in South Africa and worldwide. Like the ‘child’, the boychild is also defined in legal terms as one who is under the age of 18 and is hence a legal minor. Although the boychild, from a biological perspective, is a child of male offspring (Chang’ach, 2012), Pande, (2013) argues that it is also a social construct - that is gendered. The latter means that the notion of the boychild is constituted and conditioned by societal norms, power structures and social relations. However I agree with Nelson, Stahl, and Wallace (2015), who challenge the use of ‘boys’ and ‘gender’ as distinct analytical categories of difference when the causes that explain the pattern of boy underperformance are far more diffuse and complex. They proffer an approach based on the integration of a range of difference-related analytical categories. I interpret this to mean that history, geography, language, culture, class, gender, race, and ability are among some of the difference-related dimensions that intersect in complex ways in the lifeworld of the boychild. This is then also the multi-focal theoretical lens with which boys are depicted in this thesis, beyond a gendered or masculinised concept, but recognising that being a boy coincides with a range of axes of difference and identity which are underscored by relations of power. Next, I turn to a brief overview of literature related to the notion of a child’s playworld.

2.3.3 The township boy-child’s playworld

I draw on the concept of world-making (Bruner, 2006) when he discusses how, in narratives of the self, the world of the self is constructed. From a child’s perspective, a child constructs much of his everyday world through play, together with peers and adults. To this, Hakkarainen and Bredikyte (2014) add an aesthetic, narrative dimension that draws on Lindqvist's (2013; 1995) work on playworld. Lindqvist (ibid) uses the term ‘playworld’ as a reference to play pedagogy that draws on theories of narrative learning. This view of playworld presents a creative, aesthetic education practice at the intersections of play, drama and literature. She highlights creativity and aesthetics in play as a mediational tool for learning and cognitive development. Both Lindqvist (1995) and Hakkarainen and Bredikyte (2004) analyse the child’s playworld as a joint playworld in which the abilities, skills, roles and competencies of adults interact with those of the child and his peers. These
interactions become an essential analytical tool in the development of narrative- and other play competencies.

Lindqvist’s (op.cit) conceptualisation of playworld is set mainly in Sweden and Finland. Baumer, Ferholt and Lecusay (2005) studied five-to-seven-year olds in a school in Finland, where they explored playworld practice according to Lindqvist’s (1995) model with one group of children compared to a control group. Playworld practice included the use of children’s literature and joint-adult-child pretend-play with one group and not the other group. They found that the experimental group of children displayed better narrative competence. Baumer and Radsliff (2010) draw on an ethnographic case study set in a Finnish elementary school in 2003 to 2004, involving mixed-age children where they also observed the integration of play-world pedagogy. They found that the children and teachers assumed roles of story characters to explore and discuss various social and cultural issues. The literature, therefore, draws on the notion of playworld mainly as pedagogical practice. In the absence of studies that apply playworld as an aesthetic, creative, social, cultural-historical play-centred world as experienced by the child’s, this study hopes to make a modest contribution.

While I note that Lindqvist (ibid) applies the term playworld as a pedagogical practice, I apply the concept of playworld to include the aesthetic, narrative dimensions that incorporate the child’s interactions with peers and adults, as well as the social, cultural-historical dimensions of their everyday play. Much of the literature considers playgrounds as playworlds as demarcated outdoor spaces for children’s play (Czalczynska-Podolska, 2014; Nel, Joubert, & Hartell, 2017). However, Macfarlane, Opie and Opie (2006) have argued that children create their playgrounds from the spaces that they occupy at any given moment, like the street. In this way, they expand an understanding of the child’s playground as the spaces that children appropriate for their everyday play. My use of playworld thus refers to a range of play spaces both physical and imaginary, real and virtual including what Yahya and Wood, (2017) describe as third space which lies in-between home and school. It also refers to various forms of play that emerges within a child’s playworld, including digital play. As an analytical construct, playworld has spatial, cultural-historical, temporal, mobile, digital and aesthetic underpinnings.
I also argue that the child’s playworld, in the 21st century, includes a digital world. However, studies on children's digital realities are diverse in their settings and their findings. The literature on situating children in a digital world spans a range of theoretical perspectives and disciplines, including those from studies about

- childhood, media and popular culture (Buckingham, 2006; Liu, 2014);
- children and information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D) (Zelezny-Green, 2014, 2018);
- children’s geographies (Holloway, 2014; Holloway & Valentine, 2003; Valentine & Holloway, 2002); and

One of the critical debates relates to defining children born in a digital age, in generational terms. These include references to children born between 1980 and the late 1990s as the net-generation (Bossert, 1999), digital natives (Prensky, 2001b) or millennials (Griffin, 2002). They all address a central theme - that children and youth born in a digital age have extensive access to and are immersed in a parallel world mediated by networked, virtual, mobile digital technologies. This generation purportedly thinks, learns, plays and imagines in ways that are radically different from previous generations. Prensky, (2001b) and Griffin (2002) also characterise the digital generation as being more adept at digital literacy and digital skills than their predecessors.

These homogenising concepts have been contested by a wide range of researchers who have focused on variation within the generations of children and youth; inequality in access to and use of digital technologies; and differentiation in digital literacies, skills and competencies. Livingstone, Buckingham, and Davies (2009) explain the varied access and engagement with digital media in European and UK contexts. Some have written from the perspective of inequalities in digital access and use in a South African context, using analytical constructs like habitus and digital strangers, based on empirical research with university-aged students (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2013, 2014). They highlight how concepts such as digital natives fail to consider highly specified material, economic, social and political conditions of
children and how they fail to clarify the nature of inclusion and exclusion in the digital era about access and skills.

I agree with the critiques of the ‘digital natives’ concept because they are premised on conditions of privileged access among some youth populations, mostly in wealthy countries. The digital experiences of this group of youth are generalised to represent a generation across the globe, including those who have less privileged access in wealthier countries. However, at the same time, the nature and extent of township children’s access to and engagement with a range of digital media in naturalistic settings is poorly understood and under-studied. This is where this study’s exploration of the digital world as part of the playworld of the township boychild hopes to contribute to knowledge.

While noting these, I adopt the concept of a digital world within the playworld of the child. Here the digital world is a reference to the situated engagement with digital cultures, mediated by socially-constructed digital tools, artefacts, signs and symbols. This approach to the notion of the digital world is consistent with the critical view of digital technologies that argues that technologies are not neutral and that their creation, production and consumption are embedded and embodied in a culture and disparate social relations (Feenberg, 2017). The child’s digital world is nested within his playworld and is also continually being transformed by digital technologies (Albrecht & Tabone, 2017).

2.4 Theories of play

Play is a colloquially used concept to refer to recreational, leisurely activity involving fun and joyfulness – according to the English Oxford Living Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2019). However, in academia, play is philosophically, theoretically and operationally complex as shown by many, including Dowker et al. (2018)\textsuperscript{15}. Moreover, Lillard, Lerner, Hopkins, Dore, Smith and Palmquist (2013) have warned against the tendency to propagate a play ‘ethos’ in academia that lends itself more to rhetoric about the power of play and play as ‘progress’ (Sutton-Smith (1995:279). What is sorely needed are evidence-based results about play and children’s development. In this section, I provide a brief overview of research about

and views of play in child development and learning in an attempt to locate my focus on the boychild’s playworld.

According to Dowker et al. (2018), play is a contested construct. There is still no unifying theory on play, and operationally, play is applied differently from different theoretical vantage points. Brooker, Blaise, and Edwards (2014) identify four key strands of play research:

- A perspective that highlights the nature of play in animals relative to humans and how the evolution of play from earlier primates to humans, offer insight on the nature of play among children;
- A psychological perspective that highlight theories on play as a form of therapeutic intervention with children, referred to as play therapy;
- A perspective that focuses on the pedagogy of play and its integration in learning, teaching and curriculum, particularly in early childhood education; and
- Play as a social, cultural-historical and developmental phenomenon, integrally linked to the nature of being human.

I apply the concept of play as a developmental, social and cultural-historical phenomenon which illuminate the way children make sense of and construct their world and how their world is a situated, socially-constructed playworld. This playworld has, decidedly, elements of drama and even elements of theatre (Fritz, Henning, & Swart, 2008).

Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1967; Kozulun, 1990; Rieber, 1997), Piaget (1962), and Bruner, Jolly, and Sylva (1976), premised on various strands of constructivist epistemologies, share the view that the child at various stages of cognitive, social and emotional development, constructs and makes sense of the world through play, that play is their way of being in the world, and that the child is a playful child whose lived experiences can be reflected in their play-world. Such views are consistent with Huizinga (1949), who alludes to ‘Homo ludens’ – the imagining, human whose play is integral to the culture of being human and being a child. In addition, I adopt a constructionist frame based on Papert and Harel (1991) who show how children learn

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16 Homo Ludens was published in Dutch in 1938, was translated to German and Swiss German in 1944. This edition is the 1949 English edition
by making, building and constructing, which Thomas and Brown (2009) refer to as *Homo faber*.

Evident from the play theories espoused the mentioned authors, are a few dichotomies arise. All five theorists clarify what children’s play is *not*. As the everyday lived experience of the child, play is not always joyful, a notion which challenges the influential view espoused by Krasnor and Pepler (1980) and Garvey (1977) who propose that for an activity to be considered as play, it has to be joyful, that joy is integral to play and that it generates positive affect and intrinsic motivation. This view is also supported by Gray, (2013) and has been influential in policies and programmes on children, play and learning. For all five theorists, however, play is also not trivial, not an end in itself, not goal-driven and not always free.

Huizinga (1949) popularised the notion that play is integral to human culture and fundamental to the survival of a culture. He coined the phrase *Homo ludens*, a reference to humans as playing beings along with being thinking, cerebral beings (*Homo sapiens*) and making beings (*Homo faber*). Huizinga discusses play as an evolutionary phenomenon, emerging from the animal kingdom. In this sense, play, while older than culture, is also a function of human civilisation and culture develops in and as play. He argues that his work is not about play in culture but that culture “bears the character of play” (1949, p.15). He shows, through extensive illustration, how play is central to many dimensions of human culture such as philosophy, law, religion, war and art. Play is integral to competition, gambling, performance, wordplay, rhetoric, riddles, divination, feasts, gift-giving, rituals, honour, chivalry. He uses the term *potlach* to explain one-upmanship in gift-giving and conspicuous consumption. Here he refers to riddle competitions in early philosophy, the search for truth but with insults, jokes, poems and performances in early justice. However, with the evolution of human culture over time, play has become subtle and obscured (England, 2015). Huizinga (op.cit) also identifies a range of attributes that constitute play as a social construction that has many concrete forms. Play is a meaningful activity for the player; it is free from obligation, and it is voluntary, meaning that it is not and cannot be enforced or engaging in play cannot be on compulsion.

Huizinga (op. cit) proposed that the relationship between play and seriousness is also dynamic in that it can shift from ‘light-hearted’ playfulness to seriousness.
Huizinga states that play can sometimes also be the ‘opposite’ of seriousness. He acknowledges, therefore, that there is a joyful part of play but that this is not the only defining feature of play. Huizinga’s notion of *Homo ludens* is regarded as a seminal academic text in game studies and in digital game design. However, play is beyond games and gaming, which is an attribute also explained and supported by Smith and Pellegrini (2013). There are similarities with Huizinga’s (op. cit) play theory and those espoused by Vygotsky (1967); Piaget (1962), and Bruner, Jolly, and Sylva (1976). They each situate play within a cultural-historical context. They also highlight how play enables the creation of meaning through *imaginative* settings and topics for play, involves stepping outside of the everyday world, that play has rules and boundaries, and that play is also serious when play participants identify and solve problems creatively and innovatively. In a child’s world, play also assumes different forms, which I discuss next.

### 2.4.1 Forms of Play

Lai, Ang, Por, and Chee (2018), in a review of the literature on play and child development, make the point that play is never absent from human life, especially for children. In everyday (naturalistic) settings, different forms of play are evident. Pretend-play, digital play, violent play, play-as-making, or a combination of these, are some of the salient features of a child’s world of play.

**Pretend-play**

Mimicry, roleplay, make-believe play, socio-dramatic play, symbolic play and pretend-play have all been theorised as situations in which children recreate familiar and everyday scenes as components of their imaginative representations of their reality. In this brief overview, and for ease of reference, I refer to all these variations of role-playing, as pretend-play which serve as the child’s mediational tool in his play-world.

One of the dichotomies highlighted in the literature about children’s pretend-play is between imagination and reality, which is a dichotomy that is debunked by Vygotsky (1990), Lindqvist (2003) reminds us that Vygotsky started his career in psychology, art and literature. His work on *Imagination and Creativity in Childhood*
(Vygotsky, 1990) published originally in 1930, clarified his theory of creativity, given the ideological struggles that accompanied the reign of Stalin in the aftermath of the Russian revolution of 1917. This struggle was given expression in the disagreements on the role and value of children’s fairy tales which, from a Stalinist perspective, was considered bourgeois and trivial. Vygotsky maintained that the fairy tale is crucial because it relates to the emotional aspects of reality, thereby highlighting the role of affect in imagination. This, he argued, was also how children used their imagination, with emotion, and through aesthetic reaction (2003:247). For Vygotsky (ibid), creativity is the foundation of humanity, for art, science and technology and this creative ability is what he called imagination. To make images in the mind, which are original, and which when converted to observable activity – is a form of play, which he referred to ‘imagination in action’ (2003: 249). Importantly too, Vygotsky describes how children create their reality by imagining it. Imagination is not the opposite of ‘reality’. In imaginative play creative thinking, with elements of observable reality, are brought together (Nilsson et al., 2018).

Piaget (1962), Huizinga (1949) and Bruner, Jolly, and Sylva (1976) also theorised play as an imaginative endeavour. For Huizinga (1949), the player engages in an imaginary world ‘outside of real-life’ (or adjacent to it), with its own boundaries and with its own rules. Vygotsky (1967), Piaget (1962), and Bruner, Jolly, and Sylva (1976) show that socio-dramatic play, make-believe play, and pretend-play are manifestations of the child’s imaginative and creative responses to the real world (and the problems that children encounter in it). The central tenet of children’s play for psychologists such as Bruner et al. (1976) is that the imaginative and creative aspects of the child’s play are pivotal to the mental and cognitive development of the child.

Vygotsky (1978) proposes that socio-dramatic play or make-believe play, includes rules, acting out roles and the creation of imaginary situations by the child, which contribute to the development of the child’s ‘higher mental functions’. Concerning their acting-out of roles, they fulfil both internal and external functions. The internal functions he refers to as the ‘operations of their meanings’, which are dependent on their external functions. The prevalence of these internal functions shows that the child is engaged in developing higher mental functions towards more advanced symbolic thought, which are enabled by play. Vygotsky (1967) uses the
example of the child using a banana as if it is a phone demonstrating a situation of pretence. In this way, too, “pretend-play enables the child to be a head taller than himself” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.102). Thus, the dichotomy between imagination and reality from the perspective of the child’s play is for Vygotsky (ibid), a false dichotomy. The child’s imagination is his expression of reality, which is expressed through pretend-play.

Piaget (1962) on the other hand, developed his theory on pretend-play based on observing his own children. Piaget (ibid) considered pretend-play more as an indicator of the developmental stage of the child rather than a causal influence on the child’s development. Piaget (1962, p.155) held the view that pretend-play is preparation for imaginative aptitude. Imagination is part of what Piaget (ibid) termed the assimilation process, which involves the integration of new information and knowledge by the child with his existing knowledge.

Lillard, Hopkins, et al. (2013) have, however, found inconsistent evidence to claims that pretend-play is essential for executive function, social skill development, language, narrative and emotional development of the child. For instance, in their extensive review of empirical evidence on pretend-play, they found unconvincing evidence that play enhances creativity. They found inconsistent studies with some demonstrating positive correlation with social pretend-play and construction play and others not (2013:8). They also found that there is a relationship between pretend-play and the development of intelligence, but that the direction of these relationships is uncertain (2013:9).

Hoffmann and Russ (2012), in their study of the pretend-play of 61 girl children in kindergarten and Grade 4 in England, found a significant correlation between pretend-play and creativity in their application of an Affective Play Scale measure. Moreover, they found that the evidence on the causal relationship between pretend-play and problem-solving is not conclusive, and that there is a stronger positive correlation between construction play and problem-solving (2013:11). Their overriding conclusion is that there is limited evidence for the Vygotskian notion of a causal relationship between pretend-play and child development. They also concluded that pretend-play might be one route among many to child development and that pretend-play may also be a secondary phenomenon where other factors
may have a stronger influence. Their findings triggered theoretical, conceptual and methodological debate, which highlighted the importance of more precise frameworks for the design and implementation of further research. What is missing from their debates is the dearth of research on play and pretend-play in an African context.

Joseph, Ramani, Tlowane, and Mashatole (2014) critique Vygotskian and Piagetian theories on pretend-play because they are premised on data from the Western world. These authors implemented performance ethnography and memory elicitation in their study of a traditional game of Sepedi-speaking children called *masekitlana*. They found that the game showed unique local attributes such as the inter-relationship between social and solitary play but also generic features common to all pretend-play as explained by Vygotsky (1967) and Piaget (1962). Joseph et al. (2014) integrate gameplay as a pretend-play tool in the lives of the children in their study.

I concur with what Lillard, Hopkins, et al. (2013) say when they propose that pretend-play is more specific than play in general and that it involves a combination of the following

- a pretender;
- a representation of reality;
- an alternative to reality;
- mental representation;
- projecting onto reality;
- awareness by the pretender;
- social play in groups or played solo; and
- project objects that assume imaginary properties.

While the debates on the causal relationship between pretend-play and child development continue, for this thesis, the definition and attributes of pretend-play as outlined by Lillard et al. (ibid) is applied.

**Digital play**

The literature about digital play features the complex ways in which everyday life is becoming infused with the use of digital technologies and digital gameplay
under the influence of the rapid rise of the digital media industry, the commercialisation and marketisation of play and popular media culture. Some highlight the complexities and intersections of these influencing factors to demonstrate the challenge of clear definitions of digital play (Lester & Russell, 2014).

More recently, attempts have been made to make conceptual and practical connections between play-based learning for children and digital learning, which is how Bird and Edwards (2015) use the concept of digital play. They developed a digital play framework to support teachers and education officials in the design and implementation of play as learning with the use of digital technologies for early childhood education. This seems to be the approach adopted by the World Economic Forum and Lego® in their most recent attempts at promoting play as a mechanism for growing skills for the fourth industrial revolution in Africa (Goodwin, 2019).

In some cases, play as games are combined with learning and digital to highlight the value of game-based learning. In a South African context, Amory's (2010) study of 12 black Soweto-based orphans aged 14 to 19 years ranks among the few on how computer video games can serve as tools to mediate learning. Here more evidence is emerging related to the use of mobile phones to play games in support of learning. Isaacs, Roberts and Spencer-Smith (2019) highlight examples of the design and implementation of a mobile learning programme in South Africa incorporated gamified applications.

I also use a broad definition of digital media. Where digital technologies and popular media culture intersect, scholars have analysed the relationship between television and play, which will also fall within the realm of digital media. While there is growing variation in digital media products, coupled with growing convergence of digital products and platforms, To this I add Stadler's (2012) reference to screen media that incorporates television (TV), film and digital games. To this, I also add desk-top computers, tablets and mobile phones, leisure technologies, gaming consoles and technology-augmented toys and learning resources as highlighted by Stephen and Plowman, (2014).

Some researchers have shown that the child can self-organise and self-direct their learning when they have access to digital technologies. Papert (1990) who called the computer the ‘child’s machine’, argued that children are adept at learning
to use computers masterfully. He also showed that when children learn to use computers, they develop capabilities that enable them to change the way they learn everything else. Mitra and Crawley (2014) explain, based on four experiments, in India, that in Self Organised Learning Environments (SOLE), children can learn ahead of their time, retain their learning over time and enjoy the process enough to explore further on their own.

Bishop and Curtis (2006), showed that children refer to names of TV programmes, celebrities and brand names or copy gestures drawn from TV. They also refer to topics that they learned from watching TV and that children blend images, characters, plots from TV programmes with their traditional and everyday play. The latter includes, for example, playing ‘cops and robbers’ which they would draw from watching TV programmes related to police and thieves. Similar evidence of children’s engagement with television was found by Sibanda and Kajee (2019) in their study of children’s out of school literacy practices in a township in Johannesburg. For example, one of their children’s portraits based on a New Literacy Studies theoretical framework (Street, 2003), is of Thandi, an orphan girl who watches cartoons and educational programmes. She mimics lines from TV dramas, watches talk shows and programmes like Dora the Explora, from which she learns about the successes of celebrities, the subjects that they studied at school and solving life problems respectively.

Some frame digital play as play activity based on the use of digital toys. Bergen (2011), for example, highlights play mediated by toys that are increasingly enhanced and augmented by digital technologies. Others equate digital play to digital gameplay and the evolution of gaming cultures (Kallio, Mäyrä, & Kaipainen, 2011). The prevalence of digital gameplay among South African children is minimally reflected in the South African Kids Online Report (Phyfer et al., 2016:26) which suggests that 30,4 per cent of children interviewed, enjoyed accessing entertainment online such as music, movies and games. Stadler (2012) argues for a nuanced view that focuses on how screen media act as socialising agents that consider perspectives offered by both qualitative and quantitative studies. She suggests that are no uniform media messages of violence with uniform responses by all children everywhere. That there is limited evidence-based research on this topic, highlights the need for further scholarly inquiry, particularly in a South African context.
Digital play and digital access

In South Africa, digital play also presupposes appropriate access to digital technologies. There are few generalised barometers of the pace, nature and extent of the growing digital presence in the lives of children. Three United Nations (UN) agencies recently published a report on the state of the world’s children and the nature and extent of their digital access and inclusion (UNICEF-UNO-UNESCO, 2017). They report that one in three children under the age of 18 has access to the Internet; that children are accessing the Internet at increasingly younger ages; that increasing access to connected devices by children is fuelling a ‘bedroom culture’, with online access for many children becoming more personal, private and less supervised. They also highlight disparities in access and use with African youth being the least connected in the world (2017, p.8).

The nature and extent of digital access among children were revealed in a report by Phyfer, Burton, and Leoshut (2016), entitled South African Kids Online. Their study was based on focus group discussions with seven children’s groups (aged 9 to 17 years) and four parent groups. They also conducted face to face interviews with 913 children and 532 parents in their homes. They found that 70.4 per cent of the children interviewed had used the Internet and 95.6 per cent indicated that they sometimes or always had fun through socialising when they went online, but that language and lack of culturally appropriate content were also identified as barriers.

While there has been a slow increase in literature on South African youth and digital cultures (Bosch, 2013; Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014), there remains a dearth of knowledge about children’s digital lives and worlds. It is, therefore, challenging to generalise about the nature and extent of digital immersion by children in this country and township children in particular. In this regards the work of Walton and Pallitt’s (2012) on children in Khayelitsha schools in the Western Cape, and their access and use of digital gaming, rank among the few studies. They found that income inequalities influence consumption patterns and reproduce fragmented and unequal digital gaming practices. Sibanda and Kajee (2019, p.4) also found that Thandi, one of the township girls in their study did not have access to Digital Satellite Television (DSTV), nor her own mobile phone, that she used her uncle’s phone to play games.
such as *Teenage Girls* which she finds ‘complicated’ because the instructions are in English.

In an attempt to debunk popular myths about privileged digital access and use among youth in the UK, Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) explored the daily lives of 28 young people from different class and cultural backgrounds who were 13 to 14 years old in 2011 and 2012 in one class over one year. They recognise three intersecting spheres in the lifeworlds across all 28 youth, namely school, the home and peer groups that are increasingly mediated through networked, online, mobile technologies and that these enable forms of both connection and disconnection in their lives.

Writing also from the UK, Sharpe, Beetham, and De Freitas, (2016) provide an anthology of stories and analyses of young students’ experiences of appropriating technologies for learning. These students were also from different cultural and social class backgrounds. Sharpe et al. use the concept of ‘learning footprints of twenty-first-century learners’ which refer to “some evidence of where a learner has been or is going and what she is using and possibly leaving behind while she is making the footprints” (2016, p3). They acknowledge a blurring of spatial and temporal boundaries that combine physical, virtual, social, private, institutional and non-institutional learning locations that may be unique to each learner during a learning activity.

Notably, Erstad (2012) also adopts a ‘digital learning lives’ construct to understand the learning mobilities and trajectories of young students and their use of digital technologies in Norway while Poole, (2016) adopts the concept of ‘digital funds’ of identity in his study of young learners and digital adoption.

Different concepts have been attempted to capture the digital cultures of children and youth in their daily lives and for learning. These include digital funds of identity (Poole, 2017); digital subjectivities (Sarkar, 2016); lifeworlds (Livingstone & Sefton-Greene, 2016), and digital strangers and digital habitus (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014; 2013) as analytical constructs. While studies on children and violent digital gameplay in South Africa are limited as well, these constructs can support analyses and understanding of this phenomenon among children. I turn to the discussion on violent play next.
**Violent play**

Violent play or dark play is conceptualised in various ways in the literature. One view refers to the way children act out violent and aggressive situations through pretend-play, invariably reflecting their exposure to violence in their playworld and that caring adults need to embrace and engage with these aspects of children’s play (Bjartveit & Panayotidis, 2017). Ogunyemi and Ragpot (2015) explored the various dimensions of play and worked from a constructivist early childhood development (ECD) paradigm. They argue that educators needed support in their conceptualisation and practice of play via policy and procedures and highlight challenges associated with playful learning in ECD centres in Nigeria and South Africa. They provide an example of a child in Nigeria playing with a real gun and pretend-killing another child and compare this with references to the school shootings in the USA to show that play is also very serious, unsafe and not always educative.

A related example of pretend-play that has long been considered to project violent fantasies is superhero play. De-Souza and Radell (2011) show, however that superhero play can be integrated into play pedagogy to encourage pro-social behaviour. They provide evidence of a preschool teacher’s strategies with pro-social superhero play to address aggressive behaviour in her classroom in the USA.

Another relates to ‘play-fighting’, an allusion to behavioural elements of aggression that also contain a playfulness and where the playful intentions of the performer may be unclear, ambiguous and confusing to the person at the receiving end of the performance. Sometimes this is referred to as rough and tumble play. Rough and tumble play and play-fighting were initially introduced as a concept by anthropologist Karl Groos which was later defined by Pellegrini (1995) as those physically-vigorous behaviours in the interaction among players, that are accompanied by positive affect among them (Jarvis, 2006, p.330).

Pellegrini (1989) made a significant contribution in clarifying children’s rough and tumble play in relationship to aggression, based on his observation of Grades K-, Grade 2 and Grade 4 children during their school break, on the playground of a primary school in the US. He showed how rough and tumble play was prevalent; it accounted for 11 per cent of children’s play behaviour compared to 0,3 per cent of
aggressive behaviour. He also showed that rough and tumble play was gendered, meaning girls engaged differently in it to boys; it took place in particular playground locations and among specific ages. Building on Pellegrini (op.cit), Jarvis (2006) explored the developmental role of rough and tumble play by ethnographically observing the narratives of children in a primary school in Northern England over 18 months. She also found that rough and tumble play narratives were complex and gendered, thereby mirroring complex adult interactions. Thus, both Pellegrini and Jarvis point to rough and tumble play as being mostly non-aggressive and gendered compared to aggressive play which does not correlate with these distinct categories of age, gender or playground location.

These examples show that play with aggression comprises a spectrum ranging from play-fighting with positive affect to acting out violent situations to outright aggressive play. The latter calls into question whether play is only a progressive activity. It demonstrates that play can serve to reinforce stereotypes and can also be detrimental to the child.

Bullying

Related to violent play is the experience of bullying among children in school and beyond. Here the experience is as the one being bullied, as the bystander and observing others being bullied or as being the bully. The prevalence of bullying in South African schools has been reported from a few sources. Based on the responses of Grade 9 learners involved in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 2011, Reddy et al. (2012:6) report that 75 per cent of South African learners had experienced some form of bullying, compared to the international average of 41 per cent. Moreover, Mullis, Martin, Foy, and Hopper (2017, p.226) report that 42 per cent South African Grade 4 learners who participated in the Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2016, reported that they experienced bullying weekly. South Africa ranked the highest bullying incidence among 50 participating countries.

A few studies have also explored the culture of bullying in South African primary schools. For example, MacDonald and Swart (2009) provide a critical ethnographic study of the endemic nature of bullying culture in one primary school.
Thus, in South Africa, bullying features as the darker, shadow side of the playworld of children as does violent digital games. Here the value and quality of friendships as a protective factor in the face of bullying among children and youth in South Africa were found by Cluver, Bowes, and Gardner (2010) and was further supported in a study by Kendrick, Jutengren, and Stattin (2012).

**Digital game-play and violence**

As part of the lament on the disappearance of childhood (Postman, 1985) under the rapidly encroaching influence of popular digital media cultures, another strand in the literature on violent play illuminates extensive research on children's exposure to simulated violence in computer games or online gaming. Others equate digital play to digital gameplay and the evolution of gaming cultures (Kallio, Kirsi & Mayra & Kaipainen, 2011). The debate about digital gameplay, however, revolves around the relationship between violent digital gameplay and violent, aggressive behaviour among children. Here the jury is still out. Some studies have shown a positive correlation between exposure to digital video game violence and subsequent aggressive actions. A meta-analysis conducted in the US (Black, Carroll, & McGuigan, 1987) found 24 studies that assessed how physical aggression and violent video games are related. This early research was still used in 2018 as evidence that aggressive behaviour by children was linked to their exposure to violent video games. These studies reinforce prevailing moral panics, which was further exacerbated when the World Health Organisation added gaming disorder in their Eleventh Revision of International Classification of Diseases. The latter is defined as people who find it difficult to control the amount of time they spend on playing digital or video games (World Health Organization, 2018). In this way, excessive gaming is considered a mental health concern and is framed as an addiction.

Others have contested the views on research related to violent digital gameplay and violent aggression among both children and adults, claiming that it is complex research subject and that psychologists, in the main, have tended towards confirmation bias in current debates and public opinion as reported by Taylor (2019). Some, like Buckingham (2006) have argued that media violence can also serve to encourage self-protective behaviour and therefore can also have ‘positive’ spin-offs.
**Play as making**

Writing about an increasingly networked, digital world in the 21st century, Thomas and Brown (2009) introduces a three-dimensional framework of learning that incorporates playing (Homo ludens), knowing (Homo sapiens) and making (Homo faber). They invoke Huizinga’s (1949) depiction of play and Polanyi’s (1975) concept of personal knowledge as tacit knowledge. Concerning making, they refer to the work of Seymour Papert (Papert, 1987), also known as the father of the maker movement (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014), and his theories of construction. Papert espouses the idea of ‘learning by making’, and building knowledge through working with concrete materials (Papert & Harel, 1991), Lave, (1988) also places value on working with the hands and its relationship with working with the head, in her work on apprenticeship. In this work she shows how ‘making’ is also thinking.

Moreover, Rogoff’s (2014) influential work on the cultural nature of human development, particularly her work with the Mayan community in Guatemala for almost four decades, further highlights how children learn through their everyday observations and participation. Her work with children in Mexico and Peru (Rogoff et al., 2007) show how children help out at home, how Mexican-heritage children were more likely to collaborate, share ideas compared to middle-class children in the US. By contributing to work around the house, they learn essential skills such as learning to be considerate, take initiative and to help without being asked. In this way, according to Rogoff et al. (2007), they develop cultural repertoires of practice. This resonates with Bruner’s (1991) view in which he posits that it is “all in the constructing”, in the making of the texts or, in some cases, the photograph or video (1991:27). He says, furthermore, that ‘constructing’ is not just in the construction of the self but in the construction of a culture (1991, p.35).

The narrative about ‘making’ as playing and learning is also relevant from the viewpoint that making is associated with ‘working’ (which often involves constructing, making, building with one’s hands), a concept that is often presented in the literature as being opposed to playing. Katz (2004) describes how playing and working were fluid practices among children in Howa, a Sudanese village on which she based her ethnographic study, she also showed how with the onset of economic and political change, working became valorised and play become trivialised.
This section has reflected on play as a tool in children’s lives and as a way of being. Play also assumes varied forms as part of the everyday lived experience of the child, and that they have diverse play tools in their repertoire of play practices. I have also shown that play is not only joyful, but it is also serious and sometimes dark and are socially and culturally mediated by a range of play tools, both digital and non-digital. Next, I explain how play is integral to a child’s peer-led and peer-mediated zone of proximal development.

2.4.2 Play as child-led in ‘zones of proximal development’

One of the most often cited constructs of the Vygotskian literature is the notion of a learning something new, which is proximal to what is already known. He coined the phrase, ‘zone of proximal development’ (ZPD) as the zone of learning and development, where, through the support of more knowledgeable peers and knowledgeable adults, children can expand their knowledge by gaining knowledge that is within reach. I raise this idea now and relate it to the dialectical relationship between everyday knowledge and everyday play as integral to children’s funds of knowledge because I propose that developing complex, scientific concepts and higher mental functions involves an intersect with spontaneous concepts. The latter is claimed by Vygotsky (1967), in the ‘dramatic collisions’ (Veresov, 2004) where concepts change (De Beer & Henning, 2011). Vygotsky ibid) explains that the child creates much of his zone in the early years, through play. The ZPD is now generally understood as the space in which - through the semiotic mediation of tools and signs - the child is supported by peers and adults to build on his existing knowledge and expand his knowledge towards more abstract concepts. It is a symbolic metaphor that signifies the centrality of social interaction through peer and adult support, to the child’s knowledge construction and learning. It serves as the mediational dimension of learning and development and includes the use of physical, cultural, psychological and symbolic tools, artefacts, signs and symbols that could enable knowledge construction. Here too there have been renewed debates related to the process of internalisation and participation (Daniels, 2016).

The interaction dimension of the ZPD also relates to ‘dependency’ on adults such as teachers or parents (or more knowledgeable peers) to lead the interaction with the child, thereby leading the learning. This developmental process advances along steps and progression levels, and goals upon which the curriculum are often
structured and designed. In South African schools, these are fixed and requires compliance and many teachers who proclaim their ‘Vygotskian’ philosophy do not practice it (Henning, 2012).

While recognising the vital role played by adults, on the assumption that they have the skills, competencies and motivation to support the child’s knowledge construction, it is also essential to highlight the role of the child’s peers and peer cultures through play in advancing child-led zones of proximal development. This point has been highlighted succinctly by Hill and Wood (2019) who draw on Daniels (2016) to show that analyses of the ZPD construct require a shift. This shift needs to be from its analytical application as a space of knowledge ‘transfer’ and ‘transmission’ which only positions adults as more powerful, towards analyses that illuminate child-initiated and child-led ZPDs. They agree with Holzman (2008) that play facilitates such child-led ZPDs. In play settings, children have increased agency to identify what is proximal for them, based also on their interactions with their peers. They also show that children learn through their peer cultures, which, together with developing their working theories, constitute their funds of knowledge. In agreement with Hill and Wood (2019), I explore further how everyday play of children constitute their funds of knowledge. Hill and Wood (2019, p.1) refer to children’s ‘working theories’, how they have expressed children’s peer engagements through sharing their funds of knowledge based on their everyday practices and influences of popular culture. Their ethnographic study of four to five-year-old children in a Swiss city primary school observed how children build working theories about their existence through play. The Swiss early childhood curriculum in which children’s agency and cultures are valued, encourage children to develop working theories. Based on their work, they propose that play be engaged with in its complexity as a concept that promotes child-led zones of proximal development. They also make the connection between play in promoting children’s working theories, their child-led ZPDs and their funds of knowledge. I explain the funds of knowledge concept briefly next.

2.4.3 Play capabilities are integral to funds of knowledge

González, Moll, and Amanti (2005:72) define ‘funds of knowledge as the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being.” (2005, p72). Funds of knowledge thus refer to everyday knowledge and skills that children construct and
accumulate beyond their curriculum school knowledge. Gonzalez et al. (2005) argue that by integrating the funds of knowledge of the children in their classrooms, together with the funds of knowledge of the teachers, the teachers can filter the social and emotional experiences of the children, assisting them to form scientific and academic knowledge. In this way, working with the funds of knowledge of children, the teachers can support their ZPD. This is also echoed by Daniels (2016) and Hill and Wood (2019) in their analyses of child-led ZPDs.

Some studies have shown how the everyday play of children constitutes their ‘funds of knowledge’, what Vygotsky (1978) would term, their ‘spontaneous concepts’ and what developmental cognitive psychologists, such as Carey (2009) refer to as naïve and intuitive concepts. Children’s relations with peers and siblings in a preschool in New Zealand has revealed how children’s reciprocity contributes to their funds of knowledge (Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan, 2011). Based on an interpretive study of video recordings of children’s play in naturalistic settings in a reception class in England, Chesworth (2016) explored the views of children and the caring adults in their lives, mainly the parents and teachers. She shows how the funds of knowledge were mutually constructed, which allowed the children to co-construct meaning with the adults dialogically. She concludes that caring adults and researchers engage with the individual and collective funds of knowledge of children so that the complex nature of their play cultures can be better understood. Wood’s (2014) ethnographic study of children in Switzerland, described how children’s agency was reflected in their choices and how this demonstrated their funds of knowledge, their dispositions, their willingness to break the rules and their ability to manage events and their peers.

A few examples in the literature highlight the way the inter-relationship between everyday and schooled knowledge play out in the lives of children, teachers and communities via the curriculum in African settings. For instance, by exploring the experience of teachers and how they teach the curriculum in Uganda, Sikoyo and Jacklin’s (2009) found the uneven integration of children’s everyday knowledge with the formal, prescribed school science curriculum with higher levels of integration at more resourced schools. Based on this evidence, they argue for the focus of teacher development programmes that encourage higher levels of integration between everyday and formal knowledge. In his study of the causal reasoning of children in the foundation phase, Naude, (2015) found that children at a primary school in
Soweto, Johannesburg, drew on their spontaneous reasoning and intuitive and naïve theories to express their understanding of natural phenomena that are part of the natural science curriculum. He uses this finding to make a case for the development of formal science concepts in children by drawing on their spontaneous reasoning and understanding of natural phenomena.

**The recognition of play capabilities**

Van Oers (2010) explains how the integration of play in formal school learning has historically been challenged by the idea that play is not ‘real learning’. Play is not real learning because play is conceptualised as being trivial and fun. Play is also not real learning because it is considered to be common, everyday, informal knowledge. This is still a dominant view even though the idea of integrating play in learning appears to be on the ascendancy. The under-valuation of everyday, spontaneous, common, ‘informal’ knowledge including the knowledges that are constructed through children’s everyday play as shown by Van Oers (2010) appears in relationship to ‘scientific’ ‘powerful' knowledge (Young, 2007) that are ostensibly learned in formal, structured schooled environments. Thus there remains a dominant conceptualisation of a hierarchy of knowledges, which has been a major source of contention in South Africa in relation to curriculum reform (Hoadley, 2011; Zipin, Fataar, & Brennan, 2015). Lave, (1988) shows how functionalists have attached a negative, pejorative connotation to everyday practice by associating it with humble domesticated activities which sounds similar to Hoadley and Jansen’s (2009, p.181) disapproving reference to everyday knowledge as “driving a car, tying your shoelaces, cooking rice”. Lave’s view, to the contrary, is that knowledge in practice is constituted in practice settings, and represents the locus of the most powerful knowledgeability of people in the lived-in world (Lave, 1988:14). Based on her extensive ethnographic work with Vai and Gola (tailors in Liberia) and later, the Adult Math Project, she strengthens and contributes to the body of knowledge that recognises and gives credibility to ‘informal knowledge’ as cognition in practice and its inter-relationship with formal knowledge systems.

With learning through play on the ascendancy alongside the rapid rise of digital learning and its focus on learner-centredness, the value of everyday knowledge in relationship to schooled knowledge is again thrown into sharp relief. In this chapter, I tried to demonstrate that the value of children’s everyday play lies in
the way that play constitutes their funds of knowledge. Here I now argue, rather, that *their play capabilities are integral to their funds of knowledge*.

I highlight the importance of recognising the child’s play capabilities. In doing so, I revisit the idea of lists of core capabilities as an attempt at operationalising the recognition of playworld capabilities. Table 2.1(a-e) compares three lists of core capabilities. Nussbaum’s (2000) original list of 10 central human functional capabilities compares with Walker’s (2006) catalogue on gender equity in education based on her engagement with 40 girls in South African high schools. It also includes a children’s capabilities list developed by Biggeri and Mehrotra (2011) in their attempt to define, evaluate and measure capabilities for children’s well-being. Table 2.1a reflects attention to life, autonomy and physical bodily integrity as capabilities that feature across all three lists. The need to live a full life, be protected from violence, be physically healthy, have freedom of movement and freedom from all forms of harassment, are among the most salient capabilities in this theme.
Table 2.2a. Comparing three lists of capabilities: life and bodily health

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<tr>
<td><strong>Life:</strong> To live to the end of human life; dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.</td>
<td><strong>Autonomy:</strong> To have choices, information to make choices, planning a life after school, reflection, independence, empowerment.</td>
<td><strong>Life and physical health:</strong> To be born, be physically healthy and enjoy a life of normal length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bodily health:</strong> To have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.</td>
<td><strong>Bodily integrity and bodily health:</strong> Not to be subjected to any form of harassment at school by peers or teachers, being safe at school, making own choices about sexual relationships, be free from sexually transmitted diseases, being involved in sporting activities.</td>
<td><strong>Time-autonomy:</strong> To exercise autonomy in allocating one's time*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bodily integrity:</strong> To move freely from place to place; having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e. being able to be secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.</td>
<td><strong>Bodily integrity and bodily health:</strong> Not to be subjected to any form of harassment at school by peers or teachers, being safe at school, making own choices about sexual relationships, be free from sexually transmitted diseases, being involved in sporting activities.</td>
<td><strong>Bodily integrity and safety:</strong> To be protected from the violence of any sort</td>
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Figure 2.1b illuminate the importance of imagination, the senses, thinking, knowledge and more broadly, education, in the capabilities register of children. Having aspiration and motivation to learn is an added theme in this section of the three capabilities' lists.
Table 2.1b. Comparing three lists of capabilities: imagination, knowledge, aspiration

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central human functional capabilities</td>
<td>Gender equity in education – voices of girls</td>
<td>Preliminary list of capabilities relevant for children – voices of children</td>
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</table>

**Senses Imagination & Thought:** To use the senses, to imagine, to think, to reason. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing self-expressive works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to search for the ultimate meaning of life in one's own way. Being able to have pleasurable experiences, and to avoid non-necessary pain.

**Knowledge:** To have knowledge of school subjects which are intrinsically interesting or instrumentally useful for post-school choices of study, paid work and a career, girls’ access to all school subjects, access to powerful analytical knowledge, including knowledge of girls' and women’s lives, knowledge for critical thinking and for debating complex moral and social issues, knowledge from involvement in intrinsically interesting school societies, active inquiry, transformation of understanding, fair assessment/examination of knowledge gained.

**Education:** To be educated

**Aspiration, motivation to learn and succeed:** To have a better life, to hope

Table 2.1c highlights the centrality of emotional and mental well-being and of being loved and cared for and being able to love.

Table 2.1c. Comparing three lists of capabilities: emotion and mental well-being

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central human functional capabilities</td>
<td>Gender equity in education – voices of girls</td>
<td>Preliminary list of capabilities relevant for children – voices of children</td>
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**Emotions:** To have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one’s emotional development blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety, or by traumatic events of abuse or neglect. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.).

**Emotional integrity and emotions:** To fear which diminishes learning, either from physical punishment or verbal attacks, developing emotions and imagination for understanding, empathy, awareness and discernment.

**Mental well-being:** To be mentally healthy.

**Love and care:** To love and being loved by those who care and being able to be protected.
Table 2.1d demonstrates the inclusion of self-respect, respect for others, self-confidence, religious or other affiliations, practical reasoning related to a concept of what is good to support critical reflection and life-planning.

Table 2.1d. Comparing three lists of capabilities: respect, affiliation, participation

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central human functional capabilities</td>
<td>Gender equity in education – voices of girls</td>
<td>Preliminary list of capabilities relevant for children – voices of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical reason: To have a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.</td>
<td>Respect and recognition, self-confidence and self-esteem, To have respect for and receive respect from others, being treated with dignity, not being diminished or devalued because of one’s gender, social class, religion or race, valuing other languages, other religions and spiritual practice and human diversity, showing imaginative empathy, compassion, fairness and generosity, listing to and considering other persons’ points of view in dialogue and debate in and out of class in school, being able to act inclusively</td>
<td>Respect: To be respected and treated with dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation: To live with and toward others, to recognise and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for that situation; to have the capability for both justice and friendship. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails, at a minimum, protection against discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, caste, ethnicity, or national origin. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.</td>
<td>Social relations: To have the capability to be a friend, the capability to participate in a group for friendship and for learning; to be able to work with others to solve problems and tasks, being able to work with others to form effective or good groups for learning and organizing life at school, being able to respond to human need, social belonging</td>
<td>Social relations: To be part of social networks and to give and receive social support*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participation: To participate in and have a fair share of influence and being able to receive objective information*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation: To be protected from economic and non-economic exploitation*</td>
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Table 2.1e raises play as a capability. Nussbaum (op.cit) highlights this in her list in particular but they are not explicit in the other two lists. Biggeri and Mehrotra (op. cit) however highlights leisure as a capability chosen by children.

Table 2.1e. Comparing three lists of capabilities: play, voice and environment

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central human functional capabilities</td>
<td>Gender equity in education – voices of girls</td>
<td>Preliminary list of capabilities relevant for children – voices of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Species. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leisure activities: being able to engage in leisure activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control over one’s environment. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.</td>
<td>Voice, for participation in learning, for speaking out, not being silenced through pedagogy or power relations or harassment, or excluded from curriculum, being active in the acquisition of knowledge</td>
<td>Shelter and environment: being able to be sheltered and to live in a healthy, safe and pleasant environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mobility: Being able to move</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My comparison between the three lists demonstrates a gap concerning play. Nussbaum's (2000) list is the only one who explicitly mentions play as a capability. However, she applies the concept of play as that which is associated with fun, joy and recreation and not in the broader sense explained in this chapter. This presents an opportunity to develop the notion of children’s capabilities further.

Biggeri and Mehrotra (2011) highlight the challenges of developing a universal list for children’s capabilities, based on procedures for capabilities-list development for adults. They also state that it is possible to create sub-domains within each of the domains of capabilities that they have developed. A list of children’s play capabilities could potentially form part of a sub-domain on children’s play and developing such a list could draw on the procedures defined by Robeyns (2003) and the experience with developing the lists in Table 2.1 (a-e).

2.5 Play and academic performance in policy

Worldwide, children are governed by a host of inter-related conventions, laws and policies. These serve to provide and protect children’s universal and fundamental rights. Such policies also frame the norms about the way education should be practised. In South Africa, the right to education for all children is
enshrined in the Bill of Rights in the country’s Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996) as part of the promotion of access, equity, redress, quality, efficiency and democracy for all.

Education policy research in general and its intersections with policies on children’s play, in particular, have highlighted their rights-based underpinnings. These include the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Organisation for African Unity, 1999), the South African Constitution and Bill of Rights (Republic of South Africa, 1996) and the Children’s Act of 2005 (Republic of South Africa, 2005). Here the child is consistently defined as anyone under the age of 18. They include all children’s right to education, their right to be heard, and their ‘right to play and engage in activities that suit their age and developmental capacity’. It also states that children’s rights must be promoted, protected and respected and that all children must be treated equally and not be discriminated against. They also include the rights of children with disabilities to be encouraged and supported and their right to care for their special needs (UNICEF & Republic of South Africa, 2018).

Along with the right of children to play, the notion of learning through play is articulated in South Africa’s National Plan of Action for Children 2012 - 2017 (Republic of South Africa, 2012). Recently an online teacher training course on learning through play (Department of Basic Education (DBE) and UNICEF, 2017) and conferences on learning through play were held by the DBE in partnership with the Lego® Foundation (DBE, UNICEF, The Lego® Foundation, 2019). In these activities play is also articulated in terms of the right of children to play and to enjoy leisure. Play is further defined in terms of its affordances in enabling the social, emotional and cognitive development of the child and as a basis for joyful learning to enhance children’s imagination and creativity. Moreover, there remains an emphasis in early childhood education policy that children are being prepared for becoming future adults and less as child-citizens who are also playing citizens (Grindheim, 2017) where play reflects the multitude of ways of a child’s being in the world (Grindheim, 2017:626).
2.5.1 Policies on academic performance

Before turning to a discussion on the world of academic performance in the life of the school-going child, it would be opportune to clarify the policy environment for academic learning and performance. A web of policies, regulations and laws govern the academic performance system and the location of the child as a learner within it. They include policies related to the curriculum and curriculum reform (Chisholm, 2012), language of instruction (Posel & Casale, 2011; Spaull, 2016), assessment (Kanjee & Moloi, 2017; Kanjee & Sayed, 2013) and inclusive education policies (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van Deventer, 2016). These policies have been debated extensively in education research.

The debates centre around the conceptual underpinnings and efficacy of policy formulation under the influence of globalisation (Deacon, Osman, & Buchler, 2010; Spreen and Vally, 2010); the challenges with policy implementation (Donohue & Bornman, 2014); and the depiction of children within policy (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). More specifically, present-day policies include the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) which outline a structured and scripted curriculum and the way performance is assessed.

For example, proficiencies in reading and literacy is informed by definitions of literacy in CAPS. These are defined in terms of literacy skills that learners needed to acquire in their ‘home language’ as well as their ‘first additional language’. For many children, their ‘home language (s)’ are African languages, and their first additional language is English, which becomes the language of learning and teaching in Grade 4. Their home language taken as a school subject, is not always their mother tongue but the language in which children are proficient (Cilliers & Bloch, 2018). These skills include listening and speaking; reading and phonics; and writing and handwriting. By the end of Grade 3, learners are meant to have acquired basic foundational reading skills. They are meant to read with fluency, accuracy, prosody and comprehension. This, in turn, means that they should have acquired skills in decoding, comprehension and that they should have developed their vocabulary and read to learn (Pretorius, Jackson, Mckay, Murray & Spaull, 2016; Henning 2017). Reading performance is based on the literacy assessment model adopted in CAPS for home language and first additional language and since 2012, including a seven-level rating scale reporting format ranging from ‘not achieved’ at level one to ‘outstanding
achievement’ at level seven. Each level would consist of a description and a percentage score. A learner would be under-performing if they achieved a level one (not achieved) or level two (elementary achievement) or even level three (moderate achievement). Achieving scores at this level are indications that the learner is facing learning challenges in their respective subjects (Department of Basic Education, 2011b).

The Screening, Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy serves to improve education quality through the participatory involvement of parents, learners and teachers in assessment in ways that can clarify and focus support for learners. SIAS also guides learner admission to schools for learners with special educational needs (LSEN) and articulates policy on progression (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

SIAS is also linked to inclusive education policy as articulated in White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001b) and policies on early childhood development (ECD) (Department of Education, 2001a; Department of Social Development, 2015). These also frame the performance world. Soudien and Baxen (2006) suggest that White Paper 6 complemented and at the time of its adoption in 2005, to some extent, also completed the broad inclusionary agenda of the state. Pillay and Terlizzi, (2009) provide a succinct overview of the associated guidelines and implementation plans led by the Department of Education to implement White Paper 6, including Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education and Full Service, demonstrating an intent by the Department of Education to implement its inclusive education policies systematically. Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff, Pettipher, and Oswald (2010) demonstrate how the inclusive education policy considers parents as important partners in the development of a progressive, inclusive education system.

In this way, the policy and legislation allow parents a voice and a stake in the system. The SIAS policy also provides for learner engagement, participation and involvement in the processes of screening and assessment (DBE, 2014). The analysis by Donohue and Bornman, (2014) on the difficulties with implementing White Paper 6 is based on the ambiguity of the policy and limited implementation capacity. The tension between the complexities of inclusive education policy and the
realities faced by school actors including children are further highlighted by Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit and Van Deventer (2016). There appear to be some cases, however, that show that, despite the policy, that children with disabilities received support and care at one rural mainstream school that was not classified as a full-service school (Pather, 2011).

The brief overview of the policy environment provided shows that national education policy change has been a complex and conflictual terrain particularly since the onset of democracy and yet plays a powerfully influential role in the way children learn, are taught and assessed for performance at school. The following section discusses the world of academic performance as a ‘gaze’ from the national system and how this ‘gaze’ is experienced through the lens of the township boy-child.

2.6 The hegemonic terrain of academic performance

The title of this section proposes a central argument of the study. In a study that aims to foreground an underperforming boy-child’s potential and strengths, which remain hidden in the school template of performance, I choose to refer to the systemic misrecognition of his capabilities, as a hegemonic practice. I insert this construct as it was theorised by Gramsci (1971), in which he depicted the complex ways in which certain ideas, cultures, language and politics dominate over others in both explicit and subtle ways. The practices of hegemonic systems invariably relegate underperformers in the system to a lower rung on the ladder of achievement and reward.

For some, hegemony is a problematic concept because it crudifies and reduces analyses of systems to power relations. For others, the idea clarifies, calls out and problematises the nature of dominance within situated social relations in order to challenge inequality, oppression and subjugation.

I use the concept analytically, albeit critically, to convey the complex notion of contestations between narratives that influence decision-making and shape the way education issues are talked about; the way knowledge is produced, the way policies are made, and the way education practice happens. How contestations lead to dominance and hegemony, of some education narratives relative to others, have
been extensively clarified and debated by Ball (1990), Taylor (1997), Fataar (2006) and Hoadley (2011) who problematise some of the narratives that ground hegemonic practices. I contend that the dominance of a performative culture in school education, which currently revolves around tests and assessments can, despite some of their advantages, cause the system to lose sight of the underperforming boychild’s everyday play, his play tools and capabilities.

2.6.1 The dominance of performativity

Several authors have reflected on and critiqued the dominance of the performative discourse and its audit and managerialist culture in education. Ball (2000, 2003) has been among the most vocal in situating the rise and increasing dominance of performativity within the growth of neoliberal globalisation. Growing privatisation and commercialisation increasingly characterise the latter in national education systems accompanied by an increasing language and culture of competitive, market-driven performance. Analyses of the politics of tests and assessments that have come to dominate the education systems have criticised their role in systematising an audit culture of performativity, ‘datafication’ (Scholes, 2018) and accountability and how they inculcate a deficit narrative about the children involved.

Their critique focuses on the drive towards accountability as representing a shift from teaching and learning towards performing, as suggested by Perold, Oswald, and Swart (2012). They also derive their analyses from Ball (2003) to argue that tests and assessments have affected the way teachers work and engage in teaching as a profession. They refer specifically to how an encroaching audit culture has shifted power from the teacher and her specialised knowledge of teaching to the auditor and policy-maker, thereby influencing a decline in the voices of teachers. Hoadley and Muller (2016) also argue that assessments and tests reinforce an audit culture and are designed to instil accountability and control. This, they say, are arguments that stem mainly from education sociologists such as Au (2011).
2.6.2 The boy-underperformance narrative

The research on academic under-achievement and systemic learning ‘deficits’ as reflected in results from large scale national and cross-national assessments and school-based assessment practices has increased in the past several years. They include the Annual National Assessments (ANAs) which were administered in all South African public schools each year between 2011 and 2014, in order to ascertain the academic performance of children in Grades 1, 6 and later, Grade 9 in mathematics and languages. The ANAs served a diagnostic purpose to indicate levels of mathematics, literacy and language competencies of children. They also served to reflect difficulties experienced by children in order to inform a teaching practice that could address these challenges, based on realistic improvement targets (Kanjee & Moloi, 2017: 28-29). Also, children’s performance in literacy and languages were assessed through grade-related term tests and assignments each year, guided by South Africa’s curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2011a).

International assessments in which South Africa participated, have included the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ); the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS); and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS and pre-PIRLS). According to Braun and Kanjee (2006, p.17), these are high-quality assessment instruments premised on rigorous administration and sophisticated analyses. They provided comparisons in performance between different countries; they highlighted areas for educational intervention by governments, and they raised issues worthy of policy attention.

Because these tests and assessments are conducted for diagnostic purposes, they have also illuminated the nature and extent of cognitive challenges faced by children and youth in South Africa through evidence of more mediocre performance by boys compared with girls in general and in reading in particular. Moreover, their results have mirrored to the system, the entanglements between poor academic performance, various forms of inequality and systemic learning deficits. Here the pattern of boy-underperformance relative to girls over time has been a salient feature.
**Reading and literacy proficiency and underperforming boys**

South Africa’s performance in the latest PIRLS demonstrated the second-largest gender gap in reading performance among the 50 participating countries, which was also larger in 2016 than in 2011. Moreover, girls outperformed boys in reading in 2016 and 2011 and reading scores of boys also declined between 2011 and 2016 (Howie, Combrinck, Tshele, Roux, McLeod Palane, & Mokoena, 2017).

South Africa also participated in the SACMEQ study in 2000, 2007 and 2013, which involved Grade 6 learners and teachers from 15 Southern and East African countries in tests on health, reading and mathematics. Taylor and Spaull (2015) found that girls’ educational attainment had been improving relative to boys across ten countries in the southern and eastern African region between 2000 and 2007.

The same trend was evident where girls outperformed boys in national standardised literacy and numeracy tests via the Annual National Assessments (ANA) and the Western Cape systemic tests which assessed the knowledge and skills of learners in language and mathematics in Grades 3, 6 and 9 between 2011 and 2014 (N. Roberts, 2018). Moholwane’s (2016) study of a randomised control trial that involved 96 schools focused on developing English skills for Grade 4 learners who did not speak English as a home language in Pinetown, KwaZulu Natal, provided corroborating evidence while Wilsenach and Makaure (2018) showed gender disparities in cognitive-linguistic abilities that underpin reading development. In their study, Grade 3 Northern-Sotho learners were tested for phonological processing and reading measures in literacy instruction in English. These tests also show how boys were scoring less than girls.

Alongside evidence in the secondary literature of boy academic underachievement, as shown above, are studies that show how boys experienced higher grade repetition and drop-out rates compared to girls. The Department of Basic Education (2013:35) showed that between 2009 and 2011, grade repetition was higher among boys than girls from Grade 1 to Grade 10. This pattern of poorer boy performance appeared to extend to matric and beyond school, into higher education as shown by Spaull and Broekhuizen (2017). Their study of the 2008 matric cohort in South Africa showed that there were fewer boys than girls who wrote
matric, passed matric, obtained bachelor passes and completed an undergraduate degree.

The studies which I have referred to, confirm a pattern of boy underperformance relative to girls with various permutations in South Africa, including in assessments related to reading and literacy. This trend is also evident internationally as shown in PIRLS and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (World Bank, 2017). The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2018) further confirmed that while girls were at a disadvantage in primary school enrolment in many countries, boys were at a higher risk of dropping out of and not completing secondary school in several countries. They attributed the boy disadvantage to a host of factors including poverty, school environments that lead to boys disengaging, particularly a violent environment and inappropriate disciplinary methods. Moreover, streaming students by ability held disadvantages for boys in middle and high-income countries. They provide a host of recommendations for governments to address the gender disparities in ways that can include boys.

The generalised reading and literacy underperformance

Analyses on the generalised poor reading performance in South Africa have characterised it as a ‘cognitive catastrophe’ in which the education system had failed a generation of children and youth (Aitchison, 2018), or as being reflective of a ‘cognitive wasteland’ (Spaull, 2019) or, another manifestation of a global learning crisis (World Bank, 2017). These views are premised on the high and rising percentage of children who could not read for meaning, including among boys.

Reasons for poor performance have included the insufficient policy focus on early childhood development and primary schooling at the time of writing, which challenged the foundations that children required to become literate. That children tested in African languages in 2011 pre-PIRL performed worse than children tested in English and Afrikaans, also suggested that there were also language barriers associated with being taught to read in African languages. Moreover, primary schools in South Africa also continued to have a weak instructional core with many teachers lacking content and pedagogical knowledge. Many teachers had also reportedly delivered inadequate curriculum coverage. The home environment of many children
had not been conducive to supporting literacy development and extreme class sizes in Foundation Phase and primary schooling, also militated against learning. These were some of the key inter-related reasons provided by Spaull, Van der Berg, Wills, Gustafsson and Kotzé (2016).

Attempts at explaining and understanding the reasons for the poor reading performance at primary school level in South Africa have also included research into understanding how South African children learn to read. This question underscored intense academic debates with a spectrum of views on the definition of literacy; how children, particularly those who live at the margins of society, needed to be taught to read; what constitutes appropriate reading texts in the classroom and the home; strategies to address the professional development of teachers to support literacy development in the classroom; and the role of parents, guardians and communities in supporting literacy development. These have been documented extensively elsewhere. For example, the oft-referred historic *Mont Fleur Statement: Initial Teacher Education and Early Literacy* provided a broad albeit crude summary of the different views held in South Africa (Aitchison Aitchison, Bloch, Dixon, Green, Henning, McKay, Metcalfe, Murris, Nel, Pretorius, Spaull, Strydom, Taylor and Verbeek (2015). Another more recent working paper by Abdulatief, Guzula, Kell, Lloyd, Makoe, McKinney and Tyler (2018) provided a more extensive overview of how differences in approaches to literacy development were analysed. They draw a distinction between a broad functionalist approach focused on the importance of phonological awareness and measurement which compared to a critical literacy, whole-language approach.

Others have approached it from the perspective of focusing on reading as learning and shifting from the ‘false’ dichotomy between learning to read and reading with meaning (Henning, 2016) Henning, like Snow (2019) argues that reading for learning presupposes *vocabulary* and syntax of the reader to be sufficiently developed to understand the text. Castles, Rastle, and Nation (2018) also highlighted the evolution of conflicting views on literacy development, dubbed the ‘reading wars’ and called for ways to end the impasse in the current conflict. Clarifying this debate and taking a stance, is beyond the scope of this study.
2.6.3 Performative academic assessment and misrecognition

The concern of this thesis is that a culture of misrecognition is perpetuated in the way tests, and assessments are designed, administered and analysed. These make their way in creating dominant narratives about systemic learning deficits.

One of the concerns with national assessments such as ANA relates to the quality and accuracy of the assessment methods and their results, which have influenced the way teachers have used them. Braun and Kanjee (2006) and Marsh (2012) explored the fact that methods such as the use of percentage proportion of correct responses, which they call ‘raw scores’ in national assessments, raised questions about the measurement accuracy of the data, which, Marsh (2012) argued, have also influenced the quality of the way teachers have used them. In turn, this called into question the extent to which the results of the assessments could be utilised by the national system to improve the quality of teaching (Kanjee & Moloi, 2014).

Moreover, Moloi (2016:138-139) found that 82 per cent of the curriculum and assessment specialists that he interviewed, reported that they perceived the percentage-based reporting format not to be useful because they do not help with the designing intervention strategies to improve the system.

Other criticisms have included that assessments have been considered as high-stakes events which place undue pressure on children, their parents and teachers to perform. Global assessments have also tended to exclude low-income countries and communities, such as nomadic children (Wagner & Castillo, 2014). Furthermore, they have placed more emphasis on assessment as a form of measurement instead of as a means to inform and improve learning (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013).

On the other hand, argued Hoadley and Muller (2016: 273), the views of education psychologists such as Phelps (2012) provided empirical evidence that systemic testing improved test scores over time. They also propositioned that the assessments could support diagnosis and appropriate remediation, which could support improved learning and also teaching. This is a view that was also acknowledged by Chisholm and Wildeman (2013).
While I too am sceptical of standardised tests, the culture of performativity and managerialism, I share Soudien's (2006) view that they have enabled system actors with a deeper appreciation of how failure and inequity are related. Assessment remains essential, particularly in its potential role to inform instruction and attempts to improve their effectiveness continue to matter, such as those proposed by Kanjee and Moloi (2017). Notably too, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has also stopped the Annual National Assessments (ANA) in 2014. Kanjee and Moloi (ibid) introduce a standards-based reporting to assessment, which they argued hold the potential for improved diagnosis. However, in the meanwhile, existing diagnoses have often led to generalised deficit depiction of underperforming children which I argue perpetuates a culture of misrecognition. Misrecognition of the child also appear to be manifest during neuropsychological assessments of learners.

**Neuropsychological assessments and learners with special educational needs (LSEN)**

In addition to the assessments to determine the scholastic achievement of children in school, the national education system also includes assessments that determine barriers to learning, level of functioning and participation in order to ascertain the levels of support that is needed\(^{17}\) (Department of Basic Education, 2014). SIAS provides a detailed process to be observed by the teacher who is often the ‘case manager’, the school-based support team (SBST) and the district-based support team (DBST). Where possible, screening and identification are administered by a school psychologist. While SIAS provides guidance on the processes to be observed, it does not specify which neuropsychological tests should be applied. Often a battery of tests is applied, as shown by Pillay and Terlizzi, (2009).

One such tests is the Rey Auditory-Verbal Learning Test (RAVLT). According to Bean (2011, p.1) however, this is a neuropsychological assessment designed to evaluate verbal memory in patients that are 16 years and older, and they are used to assess the nature and severity of memory dysfunction. The RAVLT is reportedly widely used in South African schools in the assessment of memory and learning. Blumenau and Broom (2011) suggest that the Euro-American-centred RAVLT has

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\(^{17}\) These are not available in all schools, but I refer to the policy which imagines such access and use of SIAS, as this was the case in Joy of Learning Primary School.
not been adapted for a South African cultural and linguistic context. They compared the responses by South African adolescent learners to the RAVLT with their responses to a locally-adapted version, the South African List Learning Test (SALLT). They found that learners achieved a higher level of recall on SALLT, suggesting a notable impact on language differences in performance. They conclude that more culturally appropriate psychological tests are needed in South Africa.

Methodological concerns with neuropsychological assessments such as RAVLT are also raised by Jinabhai, Taylor, Rangongo, Mkhize, Anderson, Pillay and Sullivan (2004) regarding Zulu-speaking primary school children in South Africa. I, therefore, call into question the technical, cultural and linguistic relevance of instruments like RAVLT that continue to be used for the psycho-educational assessment of children in the foundation phase. These examples bear testimony to how assessments can also misread and misrecognise the child and his capabilities.

Donohue and Bornman (2014) indicate that 70 per cent of school-aged children with disabilities in South Africa were not in school at the time and that the majority who were in school were based at schools for learners with special educational needs (LSEN). Many mainstream schools do not have the resources and facilities to support learners with disabilities. These include as McKinney and Swartz, (2016:311) suggest, inaccessible buildings, the unavailability of transport, high ratios of learners to staff and inadequate skills among staff. Support systems at LSEN schools are tailored to the needs of the students. Full-service LSEN schools would typically have an occupational therapist and speech therapist and a nurse as part of the school staff. Pillay and Terlizzi’s (2009) study of one learner who transitioned from a mainstream to an LSEN school. They show that the learner benefitted psychologically by becoming more confident and independent. The learner in their study also grew socially by making more friends, feeling safer and being accepted. Furthermore, he grew academically since he received the support that he needed that enabled consistency in his performance. They suggest that the environment at the LSEN school was more conducive to providing the support that this learner needed, which was not available to him in the mainstream school. Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff, Pettipher and Oswald (2010) report on a research project that aimed to uncover and understand the experiences of parents of children with disabilities who are in mainstream classrooms in South Africa. They show that each
child was confronted with unique circumstances. These findings suggest that the experience of children in LSEN schools may be more supportive and potentially enables their recognition. However, the assessment processes involving the child that is considered to be low-performing at the mainstream school, have limitations that can lead to their misrecognition.

At the same time, what has been coined as a dilemma of difference, was also challenged with a more empowering discourse. Terzi (2005) made conceptual attempts to viewing inclusivity and the ‘dilemma of difference’ by adopting Sen’s (2005) capability approach. She shows how the capability approach provides a normative, socially-just framework that ensures that all children are treated equally while at the same time accommodating their differential needs. This involves engaging ‘disability’ through the recognition of ‘capability’.

**Language policy and performance**

The relationship between language policy in education and the language practices of township children was highlighted by Busch (2010) who found that township children tended to be multilingual because they could communicate and understand different African languages beyond the ‘bounded’, monolingualised two languages taught in school (Sesotho and English). This is consistent with Makalela’s (2015) study of children in the intermediate phase in one primary school in the Western Cape whose language practices involved the use of few languages. He terms their multilingual practice as a translinguaging practice that occurred in the classroom, which he derived from an ubuntu translinguaging model that he developed. He also found that the language repertoire of township children that he studied included the informal colloquial language which called ‘kasi taal’ (Makalela, 2014). Like Busch (ibid), he also shows that the boundaries between the languages are blurred and that the translinguaging practices of the children provided cognitive and social advantages. This resonates with the findings from Yoon's (2015) study of ‘below average’ children in one classroom which highlights the nonlinear, resourceful and innovative ways in which children arrive at language, many of which are not measurable. Kerfoot and Simon-Vandenbergen (2015) take this argument further by linking multilingual practices of township children to their role in enabling epistemic access and epistemic justice. This also suggests that misrecognition may manifest as linguistic misrecognition.
2.7 Conclusion: recognition of play capabilities as social justice

In this chapter, I have discussed theories and studies and, through these, I have proposed how the 'lived' world of a child is also playworld. I adopted the concept of play that was amalgamated from the theories of a host of play theorists who confirm that for the child, play is a serious, world-making endeavour. I explained how play assumes varied forms in the life of the child and that the playworld itself is a situated condition where play capabilities are formed. I showed how play is integral to the everyday knowledges of the child, how through play and peer cultures, the child also develops through peer-led zones of proximal development and how child’s play capabilities are integral to his funds of knowledge.

The conversation on the child’s playworld is framed through the lens of social justice theory espoused by Fraser (2008) and accentuated with Sen (1999, 2005) and Nussbaum (2002, 2005)’s capability approach. I tried to demonstrate why social justice remains a priority in South Africa’s education system due to continuing critical disparities and inequities in the system.

I argued mainly that dominant education research, policy and practice lose sight of this empowering perspective of the child in his lived playworld experience. In doing so, I juxtaposed the child’s playworld with the complex scholarly conversations about reading-challenged township boys in order to demonstrate the system’s preoccupation with performance and how performance relates to inequality. I showed how the prioritisation given to competitive, measurement-focused academic performance combined with a limited perspective on play (as that which is only joyful), eclipses the child’s agency, worldview, knowledges and capabilities derived from their everyday worlds. I argue, there are manifestations of systemic misrecognition of the child’s agency, knowledges and play capabilities as further forms of inequality and injustice in his formal world of academic performance.

I conclude the chapter with a response to the question of what a socially-just recognition of the boychild’s play capabilities would entail:

- It would involve a shift in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ways that acknowledge and integrate children’s everyday knowledges (Allaire & Gamlado, 2017; Lave, 1988; Heath, 2012) and their play capabilities as being integral to their funds of knowledge;
• It would entail recognition of child-led zones of proximal development as shown by Hill and Wood (2019);
• It would also mean that the professional development and training of teachers would be based on their recognition and integration of children’s play capabilities as being integral to their funds of knowledge, as shown by Moll et al. (2005);
• It would mean that the focus of learning and also teaching would be to enable the agency and capabilities of the child, including his play capabilities. This resonates with Nicholson, Shimpi, Kurnik, Carducci, and Jevgjovikj's (2014) call for children's voices and perspectives to be given intentional inclusion in activities and decisions designed to influence them (UNESCO, 2015);
• It would mean that education policy would consider play from the perspective of the lived experience of the child;
• It would also mean that the education, professional development and training of teachers would be required to integrate such a perspective on play;
• Moreover, because of the discourse on the dilemma of disability (Terzi, 2005), it would mean that attempts to engage disability through an emphasis on capability would feature in policy and practice much more prominently and, in this way, be accommodating and inclusive of differential needs.

I close the chapter with the assertion that the socially-just recognition of the child’s play capabilities offers a more empowering imagination of children, including township children, thereby allowing them to be seen and engaged with as national assets. My hope, as a researcher and an education activist, is that this study spotlights an appeal for seeing, understanding and acknowledging how children construct their knowledges and so developing play capabilities in their playworld, which needs to systemically recognised as a social justice imperative.
3.1 Introduction

Becoming knowledgeable about any complex domain requires a balance between creativity and conformity, between going beyond the known and being constrained by what experts have discovered (Snow, 2001, p.4)

In this methodological scene-setting chapter of the research narrative, I discuss the research design process and the genres in which the methods of the study are located. I aimed to strike a balance between, as Snow (2001) suggests, being creative and conforming to epistemological protocols of qualitative research. The chapter includes a discussion about the social justice orientation of the study, which aligns with its standpoint epistemology (Harding, 2003; 1992). Standpoint epistemology challenges the notion of neutrality; it introduces partial objectivism and produces knowledge from the perspective of power-marginalised individuals and communities.

As a qualitative research endeavour, the research adopts a combination of strategies proposed by Cresswell (2013). More specifically, it employs critical ethnography as a methodology (Carspecken, 1996; Geertz, 1998; Andersen 1989). This includes an approach to multi-sited ethnography (Gutierrez, 2014), or ethnography as a travelling practice (Clifford, 1992), as well as digital ethnography (Pink, 2016). I argue that these ethnography designs can amalgamate with principles of narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connolly, 1990, 1991) and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) as techniques to write up a critical ethnographic portrait. How these design genres are linked in the creation of a critical, ethnographic narrative portrait, is depicted in Figure 3.1.
I used a range of qualitative data collection tools to capture ‘a slice of life’ in a ‘slice of time’ in the lives of the four boy participants and, in more depth, the everyday worlds of one of the four boys. The data collection tools included document reviews, interviews, focus group discussions, direct observation, and digital story-telling. These strategies allowed me to gather a vast amount of data which I selectively and systematically synthesised to produce a critical ethnographic narrative portrait of one of the research participants. Throughout the analysis, the ‘epistemological home’ (Henning et al., 2004) of the study remained ‘standpoint’ knowledge-making.

3.2 Standpoint epistemology

As guided by Cresswell, Hanson, Clark, and Morales (2007), my task as a reflexive researcher is to make explicit my choice of a theory of knowledge or epistemology because this choice influences my methods and general ways of working with data. As further guided by Cresswell, et al. (ibid), I decided upon an epistemological position to serve as the foundation of the knowledge production process that shapes the whole research project, including how I relate to the
research participants. It also shapes how I demonstrate the quality of the data and their analysis. Moreover, it influences the way I report on, represent, and communicate the research findings and analysis to the academic community and the research participants. Thus, my epistemological values and the principles on which the research is based also influence the value judgements that I make as a researcher, about the trustworthiness of the knowledge that I have produced (Carter & Little, 2007).

This research project is based on the view that a study on the situated playworld and academic world of a township boychild, can be credible, rigorous and scientific as a qualitative inquiry. However, consistent with its critical theoretical stance, these matters are not only socially, culturally and historically constituted, they are also political, as proposed by Harding's (1992) standpoint epistemology. Henning et al. (2004) explain that standpoint epistemology focuses on lived experiences and the social relations of power that structure these experiences. In this sense, my study’s standpoint epistemology is consistent with social-justice-oriented theories (Fraser, 2008; Nussbaum, 2002, 2003; Sen, 2005), which frame this research project.

Standpoint epistemology’s starting point is the study of ‘marginalised lives’, from their perspective, as a counter-hegemonic response to the production of knowledge from the viewpoint of dominant groups. Harding (1992) demonstrates this with the example of the hegemonising of science in Nazi Germany, which served both to politicise and depoliticise science, by sustaining the dominance of powerful groups in the knowledge production enterprise. It did so by institutionalising and normalising what constituted and passed as science. In this way, Harding (ibid) argues that even dominant, powerful, normative natural science is not impartial or neutral and reflects the structure of power relations.

At the heart of standpoint epistemology lies the view that, although the researcher or observer cannot be neutral and objective, she can also not be absolutely subjective in the observation of reality and in relation to the situated research participant. Standpoint epistemology is based on the view that as an observer, I am located outside of a given system or institution in order to adopt a critical view and that I also need to acknowledge my biases, judgments and
spontaneous assumptions\textsuperscript{18}. My role as an observer is thus not removed from the reality of the research but manifests as a social being within the research system, by openly ‘disclosing’ my epistemological position.

Standpoint epistemology has been criticised and, for Harding (ibid), misconstrued, for reducing knowledge production to be a function only of power relations, for being subjectivist, relativist and ‘perspectivist’, and for promoting an ethno-scientific perspective. She challenges these ‘caricatures’ by demonstrating that standpoint epistemology recognises, objectively, the institutionalised structures of power and its role in the way knowledge is produced. For Harding (ibid), standpoint epistemology involves more than interpreting what is observed. Standpoint epistemology involves taking a view, a stance, in order to change the status quo through knowledge-making. This view is consistent with the notion of promoting ‘recognition’ as an underlying construct in the social-justice-oriented conceptual apparatus for this study.

It follows, then, that focusing research attention on the inclusion of the research subject’s perspective and experience in the national conversations related to their world, is consistent with Harding’s (ibid) approach to standpoint epistemology. I do this through research genres that encourage the social agency (Christensen, 2004) of the boy-children in this research project through their active participation in the production of knowledge. Next, I explain briefly, this study’s embrace of a qualitative research methodology.

\subsection*{3.3 Qualitative inquiry}

Qualitative inquiry is an umbrella concept for research aimed at uncovering and understanding the richness of human life (Saldaña, 2011:3) through systematic inquiry. On the one hand, the richness of human life is based on the meaning that various phenomena hold for research participants, as argued by several qualitative researchers. Merriam and Tisdell (2016), highlight how systematic qualitative inquiry helps with analysing the interpretations and meanings that research participants

\textsuperscript{18} The ‘prologue’ to the thesis suggests some of these biases, judgments and spontaneous assumptions
attribute to experiences and events. Cresswell (2013) expands on this view by explaining that meaning is also formed through interactions between people and within situated social, cultural and historical norms. Patton (2015), on the other hand, reinforces the view that qualitative inquiry is about how meaning is constructed by researchers who try to grasp and represent some of the sense participants make of their experiences of a specific aspect of their lived reality. For this, he provides a few examples. For instance, he refers to bodily meaning-making as a reference to the way the human body is a site for cultural meaning-making, while evaluative meaning-making involves making judgements about what is meaningful. He also points to the meaning ascribed to objects, tools, artefacts and symbols, from smart phones to spinning tops, from the sign of the cross to the BP gas station on the street corner. The point about the importance of ‘uncovering’ meaning and of meaning-making through qualitative research, is further reinforced by Patton (2015) when he writes:

If you want to know how much children can read, give them a reading test. If you want to know what reading means to them, you have to talk with them, listen to them, and hear their stories about the stories they love. (Patton, 2015, p.7)

Thus, influenced by Patton (2015), I tried to interpret the ‘meanings’, hidden, constructed, or otherwise, that underpinned the experience of reading underperformance, from the child’s perspective, and in the child’s voice in various modalities (as displayed in Chapter 5).

I was further inspired by Perold, Oswald, and Swart, (2012) who suggest that a qualitative research endeavour proposes an alternative, yet potentially complementary epistemology within a predominant global performative narrative and growing audit culture in education, which are reinforced by quantitative research and concomitant randomised control trials and design experiments. To this, Denzin (2009) adds, following debates about the divide between qualitative and quantitative research and the value of each, that

(Qualitative research) think[s] instead about experience, emotions, events, processes, performances, narratives, poetics, the politics of possibility. (Denzin, 2009, p.142)
These insights on the role and purpose of qualitative research guided the implementation of this study as a qualitative research endeavour within which a hybrid of research design genres is embedded.

3.4 A critical ethnographic narrative portrait as a design hybrid

As in literary studies, in which genre refers to elements of form and style, so too in research, there are ‘design’ genres. In literary studies, a genre is characterised by a given purpose, structure, content, length, or format (Saldana, 2011). With qualitative research, the approach to the inquiry, the representation, form, and ultimate presentation of the study, constitute its design genre or ‘design type’ (Henning, Van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004; Saldaña, 2011). Bruner (1991, p14) refers to genre as more of a pigeon than a pigeon hole, meaning that it is more about a way of telling, gaining meaning and comprehending than the structures and properties of the text only. Based on his explanation of narrative inquiry and narrative itself, his view is that that genre contains the plot form, the happenings or plight (the fabula), as well as the way of telling (sjuzet). In my study, I have fused different research genres and explored meaning in different ways and through different media, invoking both the ‘pigeon’ and the’ pigeon hole’, thereby creating the fabula and the sjuzet. Next, I discuss ethnography as the “way of life of an identifiable group of people” (Wolcott, 1990, p. 48), as the foundation for a fusion of research genres.

3.4.1 Ethnography

Ethnography as a research form emerged from anthropology and sociology and initially involved the study of shared patterns of behaviours and languages in naturalistic settings over some time (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Rose (2016) explains how ethnography evolved as a Western knowledge production endeavour in anthropology, aiming to understand the ‘other’ in ‘faraway lands’. It became a methodology in sociological studies in the 1960s in the US, which aimed to understand local communities. Contemporary incarnations of ethnography are more varied and include among others, the study of the self as in autoethnography (Méndez, 2014; Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2010) and virtual ethnography (Hine, 2012), where researchers aim to understand online communities.

In clarifying the methodological principles that guide ethnographic studies, Henning et al., (2004) state that the system that ethnography tries to capture is the
way of life within a social system. This involves getting to know the people and their practices as they occur as everyday actions. For Geertz (1973), ethnography is about developing detailed *thick descriptions* and interpretations of symbols and their meaning for cultures, by an observer who is immersed within that culture (Geertz, 1973, pp3-30). Geertz (1988) provides guidance on what being an ethnographer entails and what doing ethnography means. Being an ethnographer means

Being a cosmopolite, a complete investigator so rigorously objective, dispassionate, thorough, exact and disciplined. High romance and high science seizing immediacy with the zeal of a poet and abstracting from it with the zeal of an anatomist, uneasily yoked (Geertz, 1988, p. 46).

This suggests that rigorous investigative skills are required as well as having an imagination, being creative, combined with being accurate and precise. Based on the experience of being an ethnographer in this study, as derived from Geertz (ibid), I also found that it required an open mind and open eyes (Patton 2015, p11) to whatever emerges as it arises, thereby expecting the unexpected.

The doing of ethnography requires spending copious amounts of time over a sustained period, engaged in immersive, ethnographic observing (Charmaz, 2014). Such immersion is referred to by Geertz (1998) as ‘deep hanging out.’ Ethnographers have a way of observing or looking as well as a particular way of seeing (Wolcott, 2008, p. 44). For Geertz (1988), ethnography is a personal way of observing and in doing so; the ethnographer has to become what he refers to as, a ‘convincing I’ (Geertz, 1988, p. 79). In other words, the ethnographic observer has to provide convincing descriptions of observations to readers about ‘being there’.

Miles, Huberman and Saldana( 2020, p. 322) also make the point that rich, and thick descriptions have an analytic and interpretive purpose. Descriptions highlight the influential factors that inform the way events transpire within given situations.

Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in
conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour (Geertz, 1973, p. 5)

From various ethnographic studies in education, I paid specific attention to Learning to Labour. How Working-Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs (Willis, 1981) and Sneaky Kid and its Aftermath. Ethics and Intimacy (Wolcott, 2002). Willis (ibid) spent three years studying 12 boys through their last two years of school and the first year of employment during the 1970s in England. Wolcott (ibid) wrote about a 19-year-old man called Brad, who moved onto his property, and whom he befriended and later allowed to live with him. During the time that they stayed together, Wolcott conducted interviews with Brad and wrote a paper about the need for more attention to youth after they leave school. Both Wolcott and Willis provide examples of thick ethnographic description of working-class boys in different settings and highlight specific cultural attributes. Wolcott (2016) also produced a primer on lessons from ethnographic research as have LeCompte and Schensul (2010), while Henning (1993) offers guidance on doing ethnography as a classroom qualitative research methodology.

**Critical ethnography**

As a particular way of doing ethnography, this study adopted a critical ethnographic methodology as described by Carspecken (1996). He explains how critical ethnography has a value orientation towards social change in an endeavour to combat social inequalities. Critical ethnography foregrounds the need to enable the social agency and voice of research participants as part of a broader emancipatory objective. Andersen (1989) explains how critical ethnography arose historically in the 1960s and 1970s during the emergence of successive waves of critical-theoretical thought associated with a critique of the way that the social system reproduces institutional and societal inequities.

The reflexivity of the researcher is a salient feature of the critical ethnographic method. The researcher’s reflections on the relationship between theory and data, the way the researcher features in the data during data collection, the researcher’s self-reflections about biases and subjective accounts, and the relationship between the researcher and the research participants are integral to the critical ethnographic method and it requires much openness and self-awareness on the part of the
researcher. Rose (2016, p97) suggests that the ‘critical ethnographic commitment’ is also a social justice commitment, which has to be part of the study’s intention. Thus, in taking a critical ethnography stance, this research endeavour is geared towards a critique of the way inequities continue to manifest and to provide alternative possibilities of addressing them, from a specific ‘standpoint’. The voices and views of child participants are underpinned by such a social justice intent. The democratic dialogue with the children as research participants, providing opportunities to surface their voices, is premised on the view that they are, as Biggeri and Mauro (2018) suggest, capable of understanding and also capable of providing a thoughtful opinion.

Moreover, my relationship with the children as research participants, as well as my presence in the data, was mindfully self-monitored. Doing critical ethnography meant that I used a suite of data collection methods that would elicit the agency and, what I argue for firmly in the study, the capabilities of the child. Critical ethnography, I argue, is one way of capturing the play and ‘the way of life’ of the child.

**Digital ethnography**

The study also borrows from and proposes to contribute towards, an emergent sphere of ethnography referred to as digital ethnography (Pink, Horst, Postill, Hjorth, Lewis & Tacchi, 2016). Pink et al. (2016) explain how digital experiences are situated in everyday life and how ethnography as a tool of study can contribute to an understanding of digital lives. The authors further show how digital ethnography has emerged from interdisciplinary influences in anthropology, sociology, media and communications studies as well as design studies. Digital ethnography has also become prominent amidst the rise of big data or the ‘datalogical revolution’. Some suggest that traditional qualitative methods, such as the in-depth interview, is potentially under threat in the face of big data. Burrows and Savage (2014) and Savage and Burrows (2007) have been among the most vocal in suggesting that social researchers need to be aware of impending digital disruptions and how these can also open up new opportunities for research including in the sphere of digital ethnography. Selwyn (2019) highlights the massive scale of some studies such as those done by Agarwal et al. (2014), who analysed the effects of 60 million tweets
related to the #Occupy movements in the USA. Selwyn (ibid) supports the views of Pink et al. (2016) and Hine (2000) that ethnographic research can enrich understanding the way digital lives are unfolding.

One example that relates to this thesis is the ethnographic research done by Takahashi (2014) about the way social media is integrated into the everyday lives of Japanese youth and how they engage with the tensions between local and global cultures. Takahashi also reflects on the way they develop transnational connections as part of attempts to recreate themselves and the way they develop communities. Thus, while this research study about the township boychild attempts to use mobile phones to support data collection, it also incorporates ethnographic observations on the nature and extent of the digital in the everyday life of the township boychild. In this way, this study provides another example of what Wang (2013) references as producing ‘thick data’ when contrasted with the largesse and limitations of big data. To this, I add that this study contributes a small and thick ethnographic portrait in the face of the preponderance of big and broad data.

A multi-sited travelling practice

Leander et al. (2010) and Vossoughi and Gutiérrez (2014) write about ethnography as a multi-sited, travelling practice that pays attention to a way of life within and across many situations and settings. It takes account of the movement by the research participants within and between the various places that they occupy, including offline and virtual spaces. As a result, Vossoughi and Gutiérrez (ibid) suggest that ethnographic tools be developed that take account of the movement within and between different contexts. In this respect, digital storytelling through the use of cameras available on smartphones provides one example of such an ethnographic tool which I explain in more detail later.

3.6.2 Narrative inquiry

Within the fold of critical ethnography, this study employs narrative inquiry as a research genre in a fusion of tools that share an epistemological base with ethnography. In this blend, the techniques and representative modalities suggested by Connelly and Clandinin (1990; 2006), Clandinin (2000), Clandinin et al., (2006), Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007), and Clandinin, Huber and Orr, (2009) were
employed in this study. In narrative inquiry, the *narrative* itself is the unit of analysis as a method and as a phenomenon. In narrative inquiry, humans individually and collectively, are storied and ‘storifying animals’. Narrative inquiry suggests that the story or narrative is the basis upon which a person or group interprets, makes meaning of and constructs the world. Connelly and Clandinin (1990;2006) also suggest that it can be thought of as the study of human experience, of meaning-making, and of the construction of meaning-making as story. This idea was developed earlier by Bruner (1991) who theorised narrative as a human mode of knowing.

I engaged with the notion of narrative inquiry as a study of narrative as a phenomenon and as a method. As a phenomenon, the narrative is, as Bruner (1991) posits, a mode of knowing. Bruner (ibid) contrasts a narrative mode of knowing with a logical-scientific mode of knowing and depicts it as a form of common, everyday knowledge and stories, which is ‘temporally structured’. According to Monteagudo-Gonzalez (2011), narrative is also a feature of the human capacity to make, change and transform reality through imagination – a feature of children’s play that has relevance for this study. Studying the *phenomenon* of storied lives while representing it in narrative modality, acknowledges the children as research participants - they narrate their lives, and I as a researcher, tell their lived stories.

Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) highlight the importance of clarifying why narrative inquiry is implemented as a design type of a study. They identify the need to clarify the personal, practical and social justification for doing this type of study. Personal, practical, and social justification for this study was triggered by my realisation of the dominant, deficit narratives, consistently expressed in the media, about South Africa’s poor performance in reading and literacy assessments. My interest lay in understanding what could be in the subtext of these dominant stories. Already, then, I realised that some narratives are more visible while others are hidden. I was interested in the ‘hidden’ narratives; this also informed the selection of the sample for the study. I also sought to uncover narrative knowledge that can add value to and challenge existing research narratives on under-performing boy-children.
Applying narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry was applied methodologically in this thesis study, to serve a range of purposes that were often interrelated. It was used to produce stories of, and by, the research participants of their lived experiences. It was also used to enable the agency and voice of research participants in order to provide empowering alternative discourse. Bleakley (2005), in her application of narrative inquiry in clinical education, used stories as raw data for subsequent analysis and synthesis. Smith-Chandler and Swart (2014) applied narrative inquiry to offer alternative empowering narratives on disability that can counter deficit narratives. They presented stories by individuals with disabilities to illuminate the centrality of their voices as experts instead of objects of inquiry in national conversations on disability. They proposed that narrative inquiry can be a methodological tool to enable the agency of those who are often marginalised from society. Knowles, Nieuwenhuis, and Smit (2009) provided a narrative analysis of the lived experiences of four professional teachers as mothers and as educational practitioners. Through narrative inquiry, they demonstrated how the research participants as mother-educators, constructed their different roles based on cultural beliefs, how they engaged with tensions and power relations, and how they come to terms with identity construction and reconstruction. Smit and Fritz (2008) applied an ethnographic narrative to portray the lives of a teacher in a rural township school and one in an urban Afrikaans school and their experience of educational change, more than a decade into the post-apartheid era. They applied the metaphorical three-dimensional inquiry space, drawing on Connelly and Clandinin (2000), within a constructivist, interpretive paradigm, espoused by Denzin and Lincoln (2005). They also applied theoretical constructs of personal, situational and social identity. Henning (2000) applied narrative inquiry in illuminating the educational journeys of seven non-qualified teachers who were part of a community-based teacher education project in Johannesburg. Their ethnographic narratives revealed their aspirations and sense of community. These examples provide insights into the range of ways the narrative inquiry method was applied as part of ethnographic inquiry.

While these examples demonstrate the use of narrative inquiry with teachers, few show how the methodology can be applied with children. Consistent with the rationale and themes of this study, Clandinin et al. (2006) also take issue with the way
predominance of managerialism and testing eclipses the complexity and often-unquantifiable nature of the ‘real lives’ of children and their teachers, and how they are excluded from curriculum design. They implemented narrative inquiry to highlight the citizenship dimensions and the wholeness of people’s lives as an alternative to the dominant school-as-a-business approach. In this way, they demonstrate how narrative inquiry is not neutral and opens up political contestation.

Building on the various ways in which narrative inquiry has been applied by the authors whom I have referred to, this study employed the genre as a phenomenon and as a method. As a phenomenon, it reveals how the research participants story their daily lives in their world of play. Pinnegar, Daynes, and Daynes (2007) note that there are various methods of narrative inquiry, such as critical analysis, historiography, meta-narratives. This thesis has tended towards the use of literary techniques such as plotline, theme, and characterisation, in an attempt to make sense of situated experiences as they are lived, told and observed. As a method, I relied on the richness and thickness of insights that narratives of lived experiences and daily lives reveal, thereby invoking the power of narrative knowing. I further employed the method by demonstrating to the research participants as boy-children how they can compose their narratives. In doing so, I invested in the mindfulness required to manage the relationship between the research participants and myself as researcher, who is imbued with her own biases, identities and narratives. I also applied narrative inquiry method in an attempt to both counter and complement dominant quantitative research approaches to researching children’s performance. Moreover, I employed narrative inquiry in order to enable voice and agency among the research participants.

3.6.3 Portraiture

…I wanted the subjects to feel “seen” like I had felt seen—fully attended to, recognised, appreciated, respected, and scrutinised. I wanted them to feel both the discovery and generosity of the process as well as the penetrating and careful investigation. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 6)

With its emphasis on seeing, appreciating and recognising as the underlying rationale for developing portraiture as a methodology, the purpose of this study aligns
with Lawrence-Lightfoot’s proposition; the leading research participant was to be rendered more visible, as someone who is adequately attended to and who is recognised. Lawrence-Lightfoot (ibid) explains, further, that as an attempt to integrate artistic and creative dimensions with the rigour of scientific endeavour, portraiture as a methodology requires a dialogue between art and science by “merging good ethnography with fine literature” (2005, p. 6). Building on Lawrence-Lightfoot, (1981; 2016) and the seminal Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, (1997) study, my study combines narrative inquiry, with the methodological attributes of portraiture. Muccio, Reybold and Kidd (2014) coin portraiture as a form of narrative inquiry. Its methodological attributes relate to the active role of the researcher-portraitist in growing a relationship with the research participants when composing a narrative portrait. The researcher listens for the stories and engages with the paradoxes that invariably emerge, and maintains an awareness of and sensitivity to the perspectives of the research participants. The researcher is also tasked with the responsibility to capture the complexity, dynamism and drama through what Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) calls, authentic representation. Such representation includes the upfront acknowledgement of the subjectivity, history, identity and positionality of the portraitist whose task is also to represent the research participants empathetically and critically.

Portraiture has been criticised for its proposition as an alternative qualitative methodology by English (2000) who questions the quality, rigour and the ‘esoteric’ approach to telling the good stories. Here he sheds light on Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1983) portraits of good high schools and her use of portraiture to project the stories of ‘goodness’ in contrast to deficit narratives. For him, portraiture is a non-scientific endeavour. While mindful of the criticisms, this study favours Muccio, Reybold and Kidd's (2014) well-argued responses to ‘methodological fundamentalism’, based on rich insights from their study of three masters students of early childhood development at a university in the USA. They show how they were able to sustain research quality and rigour through the use of the narrative portraiture methodology, thereby challenging its critiques.

Otherwise, portraiture has been embraced enthusiastically by several education researchers. Dixson, Chapman, and Hill, (2005), applied portraiture as a methodology that transcends positivist interventions and that foregrounds context,
voice, *aesthetics* and perspective. For them, portraiture offers a mix of qualitative methodologies including life history, generic naturalist inquiry and ethnographic methods. There are elements of these methods in the application of ethnographic narrative portraiture to this inquiry. They have also expanded the boundaries of portraiture research to include the use of jazz and poetry. Featherstone (1989), on the other hand, honed in on the methodology’s linkages between intimate storytelling and public discourses on race, class and gender. He equated the methodology to a ‘people’s scholarship’. Quigley, Trauth-Nare, Beeman-Cadwallader and Aikenhead (2015) explored the viability of using portraiture as a methodology to portray the lives of two science teachers and their classrooms in the USA. They found that the methodology enabled a sensitivity and awareness to the teachers’ contexts, which made it a valuable methodology. They showed how portraiture could enable a richer understanding of the context of teachers and teaching in science education. They further found that portraiture illuminated the voices of teachers and their relationships with science, which they argued, are often missing in research on science education.

Chapman (2007) applied it as part of critical race theory to evaluate success and failure in urban classrooms in the USA. In this way, the researchers could evoke personal, professional, and political dimensions on related to race, class, and gender in education research. They also used their approach as a basis for urban school reform as social action.

Portraiture methodology has also been applied in various South African education context contexts. One the one hand, Henning and Van der Westhuizen (2004) applied portraiture in their study of three novice adult learners, to explore the limitations of distributed cognition when learning global online courses in local rural contexts. Murakami-Ramalho, Piert, and Militello (2008) used portraiture to portray their personal intellectual journeys and experiences throughout their doctoral studies. Perold, Oswald, and Swart (2012), on the other hand, constructed portraits of the lived experiences of three teachers who teach in a primary school set in a vulnerable community. Their portraits reveal the teachers’ experiences of the culture of performance and performativity and how they use language to make meaning in the context of promoting a practice of care in their school. One of the few examples of how portraiture methodology was applied with children, is the way Busch (2010) worked with children aged 13 and 14 in townships in Cape Town where they
demonstrate their multilingualism through language portraits that involved drawings of the human body and where they located their various languages. In this way, they also revealed their emotional dispositions and their affinities with their various communities.

I learned from the way these vivid techniques of portraiture have been applied in the studies mentioned above, particularly the methodology’s embrace of the “descriptive, aesthetic, and experiential dimensions” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, p6) of qualitative research. I too chose to use Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’ (1997) five components of portraiture: Context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and the aesthetic whole; to create an authentic portrait of research participants. I chose to illuminate the situated context of post-apartheid township life and the voices of the research participants. I was consistently mindful of my subjectivity and identity in building my relationship with research participants. I analysed the themes that emerged in their narratives and chose to depict the leading participant’s portrait aesthetically. Here I applied a ‘zine’ format in the write-up of a rich, thick portrait of the leading research subject, to give expression to his playworld and ‘zine culture’ (Nuttall, 2009). I drew on Nuttall’s (ibid) analysis of the mix of global and local urban cultures in a rapidly changing Johannesburg, including Soweto, in an attempt to depict the storied insights of one nine-turning-ten-year-old township boychild. In this way, I interpreted the methodological guidelines for portraiture spelt out by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997).

3.7 Data collection tools and instruments

I used ethnographic methods in keeping with the notion of ‘deep hanging out’ (Geertz, 1998) such as direct observation, participant observation and interviewing as well as methods that enable children participants to engage in their languages and their voices. Digital storytelling is one such participatory method.

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19 Zine format refers to the magazine-like style of layout and write-up that was applied in Chapter 5, in writing up Kabelo’s portrait.
3.7.1 Digital storytelling

In an attempt to encourage the active participation of the boy-children as research participants, and to harness the accessibility and affordances of mobile digital technologies, I chose to include aspects of a digital storytelling method. I employed some of the principles and techniques offered by Lambert (2010). He provides a working definition of digital storytelling as the telling of a story enabled by the use of digital media. It usually involves the development of a two-to-five-minute audio-visual clip that combines photos with voice-over narration. He also offers seven steps in the creation of a digital story, starting with owning the story to sharing the story. These seven steps were followed as far as possible in the design of the workshops to support the four boys with their digital storytelling project. I also borrowed from the experience with researching homes and everyday life and the use of photos and videos as elucidated by Pink, Mackley, Moroșanu, Mitchell and Bhamra (2017).

Digital storytelling has been applied as a participatory research method in different sectors. It has been applied in storytelling through participatory research in the health sector (Rieger et al., 2018), or as part of a narrative method to enable remote communities in Canada to participate in research (Cunsolo Willox, Harper, & Edge, 2013). Pandya, Pagdilao, Kim and Marquez (2015) analysed 18 digital videos that were produced by eight-to-ten- year old children, which asked them what the key features of their narratives were and what was important in their lives. They showed how children develop a broad sense of learning about their world and ownership of that knowledge through the process of making their digital videos.

Children were the authorities on their subjects during the video-production period and did pose and solve a variety of problems in the process (Pandya et al., 2015, p .15)

Such participatory attributes made digital storytelling appealing for this study. Each of the four boy-children was provided with a smartphone which they were allowed to keep with them for four months, from January 2018 to April 2018. I hosted
five workshops on Saturday mornings during this period, which ran from 10h00 till 14h00. Table 3.1 outlines the topics that were discussed, the content of each workshop and the tools that were used to support workshop facilitation. I facilitated the workshop with the assistance of the research translator. These workshops were held at the Children’s Lab at the Centre for Education Practice Research (CEPR), in the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg’s Soweto campus. I enrolled in a digital storytelling webinar hosted by the Center for Digital Storytelling (2018) on 5 February 2018. This webinar also referenced a digital storytelling cookbook (Lambert, 2010) which I consulted. I applied some of the techniques suggested at the webinar and in Lambert (ibid) in the workshops that followed my participation at the webinar. One of these workshops was facilitated by an expert digital storytelling facilitator.

The boys were given an assignment at the end of each workshop which involved identifying key messages in their own stories, drawing storyboards while at home; making videos and taking photographs based on their storyboards. These workshops were recorded using a mobile device. The recordings and products from the workshops served as data that were consolidated and coded. Following these workshops, each of the boys returned the mobile phones at the end of April 2018. Their mobile phones were examined for their content, particularly their photographs, videos and digital stories. These too, were treated as visual data which were consolidated into files and coded.

Table 3.1 Saturday digital storying-telling workshops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 January 2018</td>
<td>How to tell my story</td>
<td>What is a story? Examples of children in Africa telling their stories. How can I tell my story?</td>
<td>Koki pens, Flipchart, A4 sheets, Crayons, Mobile phones for each participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 January 2018</td>
<td>How to tell my story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 February 2018</td>
<td>Using the cell phone to tell my story</td>
<td>How do I create my storyboard? How to take photographs and videos based on my storyboard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 March 2018</td>
<td>Working on my digital story</td>
<td>Listen to my story What do you think of my story?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 April 2018</td>
<td>Sharing my digital story</td>
<td>Discussing my digital story</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data from the workshops and the content on the mobile phones served as core data for this research because they emanated from the participants themselves. The content on the mobile phone of one of the boys was further used as the primary material in the write-up of the ethnographic narrative portrait of one of them, whom I studied in-depth. In this way, too, the digital storytelling method was used to elicit the democratic participation of the four boys and to enable their agency.

3.7.2 Direct observation

According to Patton (2015), direct observation requires going into a setting, seeing first-hand, and describing what is being observed. These observations are captured as ‘thick’ descriptions in the naturalistic settings and include a range of objects, interactions and semiotic indicators. Direct observation is a central method for ethnographic research. The documentation of direct observations would be the data in field notes, detailed descriptions, different modes of recording such as photographs, videos, audio recordings. What is essential at the outset, though, is to determine the purpose of direct observation in different settings. In this respect, the ‘settings’ were spaces of dynamism and fluidity. It is consistent with the arguments propounded by Leander et al. (2010) and Vossoughi and Gutiérrez (2014), about ethnography as a multi-sited, travelling practice. Thus, the settings that were being observed include a hybrid of places as well as the movement within and between places. For this study, the purpose of direct observation is to observe the child closely, capturing his activities, tasks, and how and when he uses tools and signs that signify his world; the way he interacts with people, the tools, activities; and the ‘rules’ of the situation or setting. Moreover, the ‘settings’ ranged from the classroom, the playground, the church, the cemetery, different spaces in different homes, to the virtual spaces on his digital devices and the movement between these, both ‘online’ and offline.

Thus, when observing the child in the classroom, I would, as Wragg, (2012) suggests, note the tasks that are given to him, the incidents that reveal his demeanour and relationships with his peers and his teacher, the nature of classroom protocols or rules, as well as the classroom setting. I would apply this approach to observation during home visits, during observations of him on the playground, in church, at the cemetery, and in the car, and when he interacts with digital devices. I developed a multi-sited observation guideline based on Wragg (2012) on classroom
observation and Carspecken (1996, p.47) on the qualities and components of thick description. This guide includes

- Observations of spatial locations, movement, and interactions with people in a given setting;
- Noting speech acts, body movement, body postures;
- Observations of tools, tasks and activities that take place in a given setting; and
- A checklist of photographs and videos that I needed to record.

The multi-sited observation guidelines are available in Appendix B. I combined the use of these guidelines for direct observations with the way I chose to review a range of documents that frame and emerge from these settings.

3.7.3 Document reviews

For qualitative researchers, everyday life is lived and recorded via a host of documentary forms. They range from technical manuals to contracts, academic records, email messages, photos, blogs, maps, as well as letters and diaries (Kathy Charmaz, 2014). Prior (2008) explains that documents have traditionally been used in social research as evidence with emphasis on analysis of their content as inert text. However, she shows that documents also emerge, exist and are used within a given situation. For this reason, she proposes that the various forms and modes that they assume, can be used in social research as a resource based on their content, but that this is also subject to the way the content is interpreted. Usually, the content of documents can be coded and categorised. In this way they are utilised primarily as a resource. However, she states further that documents can also be used as topics. This means they can be analysed in relationship to their function and use by various social actors and for their use in the interactions between social actors in institutions and within particular settings.

For this study, various texts served as sources of information and evidence. Applying Prior’s (2008) approach, I made use of a range of documents as evidence which were consulted for their content, the use by the social actors involved in the
research and their use as a basis for interaction between various actors in the ecosystem of relations in which the boychild was located. I show which documents served these different purposes for this research in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. Document reviewed in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of research approach</th>
<th>Document as resource</th>
<th>Document as a topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>International conventions such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; National policy documents such as Education White Paper 6</td>
<td>Student notebooks and workbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use and interaction</td>
<td>National policy documents such as CAPS and SIAS</td>
<td>Learner Profiles; All student assessment reports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

International conventions and national policies were used as a resource to provide insight into the legal, regulatory and policy context within which the boychild, his play and academic performance is situated. Relevant excerpts, quotes and passages were identified and recorded, drawn from the document content. Where documents were used as topics, their content and their uses by various research participants were identified. For example, the boychild’s school notebooks were reviewed for their content and as a document around which the child and the teacher and sometimes the child and parent, engaged. Some policies such as the Screening, Identification and Assessment and Support (SIAS) and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) were also reviewed as a resource based on their use and function in the schooling system. Assessment reports were recognised as the documents with which the teachers and parents interact with one another, based on the performance of the child. Their observations about the purpose, content, and implications of the assessment reports were also recorded. The review of these documents was guided by the study’s purpose, research problem and unit of analysis.

3.7.4 Dialogical data collection

Carspecken (1996) refers to dialogical data collection as data that is generated from dialogues between the researcher and the research participants under conditions that are not naturalistic. He suggests further that during these dialogues, the research participants would engage in ways that differ from the way
they talk and engage in everyday life (1996). These dialogic data collections methods would include qualitative interviews and focus group discussions.

**Interviews**

According to Patton (2015, p14), qualitative interviews enable direct talk with research participants and include quotations about experiences, views, feelings, and what they know. As quoted in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2012), LeCompte and Preissle (1993) identify six different types of interviews: ethnographic interviews, elite interviews, standardised interviews, in-depth interviews, life history interviews and focus groups.

I adopted in-depth interviews, ethnographic interviews and focus groups as interview-based methods for this study. The differences with these various interview types depend on the extent to which they are structured, that is, whether they are formal, semi-formal or informal and whether the questions they ask are open-ended or closed. They would also differ in terms of the number of people who are involved, whether it is a discussion with a group or a dialogue between one researcher and one participant. Each is guided by the purpose of the research. For this study, I employed semi-structured in-depth interviews with the teachers, one of the teacher assistants, the mothers and fathers and the school psychologist. For these, I employed an interview protocol which contained guiding questions. When conducting one on one interviews with the boys, I solicited the help of the research translator. The interview protocol used during interviews with the teacher, school psychologist and the boys, is available in Appendix B. These interviews would last between 45 minutes to 70 minutes and they took place at the school or an office at the University of Johannesburg’s CEPR.

I also conducted interviews with the friends of the boys while on the school playground; with the mothers and the grandfather of one of the boys while in their homes during my home visits and with the teachers during breaks while at the school. These assumed the form of informal, unstructured conversational interviews which took place at opportunistic moments during site visits and they would typically last for 15 minutes.

In addition, I conducted focus group interviews with the four boys and, separately, with their mothers. Sometimes the discussion would include only two
boys. The purpose of these interviews with the boys was to hear their views and voices on a range of issues related to their lives at school, at home, in the community, their worlds of play and their digital worlds (Morgan, 1998). Four focus group discussions were held with the four boys, and four were held only with the two boys whose struggles with reading in English and their home languages were pronounced. These interviews took place once a month between October 2017 and March 2018 at the Centre for Education Practice Research (CEPR) based at the Soweto Campus of the University of Johannesburg. They lasted between 45 minutes to an hour, including short breaks from time to time. A schedule of semi-structured questions guided the focus group interviews.

Between October 2017 to April 2018, I conducted three focus group interviews with all four mothers. During the first one, I used a questionnaire to guide the discussion and on the second occasion, a separate questionnaire, related to the time schedules of each of their sons. During the third interview, we discussed their experience with, and their views about the boys’ academic performance and lives at school. These interviews would last approximately 90 minutes and included two short breaks.

3.8 Data collection and management

Patton (2015) observes that data collection is about the experience of being in the field, and that involves the thinking, the ‘being there’ and the doing of the research design. Data collection for this research first involved planning my fieldwork and managing of the process, which would include data storage.

3.8.1 Fieldwork planning

I used a detailed colour-coded Gantt chart that identified, in advance, the research activities, the instruments that I planned to use, the frequency and time allocation commencing 24 August 2017 till December 2018. Table 3.3 provides a snapshot of the initial phase of the fieldwork plan. Having a plan was a way to get started and give direction on how data collection could unfold. However, like with all plans, they never materialise as intended. Unforeseen circumstances invariably arose which required changes to be made in the original plan continuously. Being, flexible and treating data collection as an emergent process was a way of managing the implementation of the field plan. Patton (2015) confirms that the tension between
a fieldwork plan and its implementation shows that research design is not bounded
and linear and that instead, involves a process and a way of thinking

Table 3.3 Fieldwork planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Phase</th>
<th>Research Activity</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Planned Frequency</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Phase</td>
<td>Introduction to School Management by Supervisor</td>
<td>Informal discussions and formal update; Photo essay on school infrastructure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24 Aug 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observe G2 Sotho class</td>
<td>Classroom observation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24 Aug 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion G2 Sotho teacher (N)</td>
<td>Informal initial interview</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24 Aug 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observe G2 Zulu class</td>
<td>Classroom Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td>25 Aug 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion G2 Zulu teacher</td>
<td>Informal initial interview</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25 Aug 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                | Initial meeting with mothers                          | Agenda and script
Introductory letter and explanatory notes for mothers
Parental consent forms | 1 | 2 Sept 2017 |
|                | Observe Kabelo and Kamu Playground                    | Playground observation                                                       | 1                 | 4 Sept 2017 |
|                | Zoo visit with G2                                      | Informal engagement with boys and teachers                                  | 1                 | 4 Sept 2017 |

3.8.2 In the field

I planned and implemented three distinct fieldwork phases. An initial introductory phase took place in August 2017 and September 2017 and focused on getting to know the setting, the school, and the various role-players. The second phase (1 October 2017 to 30 April 2018) involved the refinement of instruments and conducting the bulk of the fieldwork. The third phase (1 May to 20 December 2018) involved closer engagement with one of the four boys, particularly in the write up of his ethnographic portrait.

During phases 2 and 3, interviews, focus group discussions, home visits and workshops, I was supported by a research assistant from the CEPR on the university campus. Because he was able to speak both Sesotho and isiZulu and because he
was born and raised in Soweto, he was also familiar with the cultural-historical and social dynamics of life in the township. When we drove to a research site, he would provide insights into the social make-up and history of different parts of Soweto and relate his personal experiences. When debriefing on respective site visits, he would relate his observations from his perspective as a Sowetan. One example that stands out here is how he related the games that he played as a child, after observing one of the boys playing with his cousins in the backyard of his home.

**Introductory phase: 20 August 2017 to 30 September 2017**

I started with informal introductory discussions with the school management team, which included the head of department who advised on the best days of the week to visit. I first observed each of the two Grade 2 classrooms and engaged in semi-formal ethnographic interviews with each of the teachers on site. They advised on the boys who met the selection criteria. Once the four boys were finalised, I planned a Saturday morning meeting with their mothers. At this meeting which took place in September 2017, the research purpose and process was explained to them. They were given a written summary of the research, which included the request for their consent and the consent of the boys’ fathers. They took the consent forms home with them to collect the signatures of the fathers and returned the consent forms to the researcher within a week. I was permitted to video-record classroom visits as well as home visits. Once consent was granted, I proceeded with initial focus group discussions and interviews with the boys in September and October 2017 so that we could establish a rapport. I was assisted by a research translator. We also sought the permission of the boys to visit them at home. Before the home visits, I interviewed one of the teachers and a teacher assistant.

**Phase 2: 1 October 2017 to 30 April 2018**

During phase 2, I refined the research instruments and commenced with home visits, classroom observations, playground observations, focus group discussions and interviews with each of the boys and two of their friends. On average, I visited various sites weekly from 1 October 2017 to 30 April 2018. On the few occasions when I had to travel overseas during this period, I would compensate for my absence by visiting sites twice a week upon my return. I would spend three hours on average during home visits and visits to other sites and on average, two hours during
classroom visits. Classroom visits would often take place on Tuesdays to Thursdays, and I would alternate morning and afternoon visits. Home visits would take place in the afternoons after school, in the mornings or afternoons during school holidays and in the afternoons on weekends.

The mothers of the four boys were interviewed individually and during focus group discussions. The topics for two of these discussions were about digital access and use in their homes as well as how the boys spent their time on a typical day, during holidays and on weekends. We also discussed the academic performance of the boys and the role they played as parents when engaging the school authorities on matters of academic performance. I conducted one semi-structured interview with the fathers of three of the boys as well as the grandfather of one of the boys and also spoke to two of them on two occasions each during home visits.

I began the digital story-telling workshops in January 2018. I purchased the four mobile phones and supplied each of the boys with a mobile phone after we had conducted our first introductory workshop. They held onto the phones until the end of April 2018. I also interviewed the Grade 2 teacher who had left the school by February 2018, and I interviewed the school psychologist.

By April 2018 I had realised that I was going to explore further, the world of play and academic performance of one of the four boys, pseudo-named Kabelo. I organised a ‘closure’ get-together which was attended by the four boys, their mothers and the research translator. This gathering took place at Gold Reef City, which was the place chosen by the boys for their closure meeting. We met at the Spur restaurant to discuss the conclusion and closure of the research process. We spoke about their experiences with the research process and their views on the future.

**Phase 3: 1 May 2018 to 31 January 2019**

Phase 3 focused on in-depth fieldwork with one of the boys, pseudo-named Kabelo. Following the closure workshop, I proceeded with interviews with Kabelo’s mother and Kabelo and continued to visit their new home in Mapetla, Soweto. By then, Kabelo was moved to a school for learners with special educational needs (LSEN). Because permission had not yet been granted to conduct research at the LSEN school, the fieldwork with Kabelo and his mother focused on his experiences at his new school and preparing for the write-up of his portrait. I discussed my initial
plan for his portrait with Kabelo and then separately with both Kabelo and his mother. He helped with choosing photographs and vignettes to be included in his portrait. I wrote up initial drafts and checked them with him and his mother. We met over two Saturday mornings at the CEPR to discuss initial drafts of the portrait. I prepared the final drafts and worked with a professional layout artist to complete the desk-top publication of the portrait. I met with Kabelo to invite changes to the completed product and then met with both Kabelo and his mother to read through the portrait together.

3.8.3 Data capture

The approach for data capturing was informed by the need to build a primary record, as suggested by Carspecken (1996). Building such a record meant that I had to capture my observations at various sites, interviews, and focus group discussions directly through the use of video and audio recordings but that I also write up field notes and memos. These were captured on a word processing application on my computer. Table 3.4 provides an example of my field notes.

Table 3.4. Extract from field notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Visit, Thursday, 19 October 2017. Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As planned, I decided during the 15-minute break at 11h45 to 12h00, to talk to Kabelo and Kamu. I invited them into the classroom and closed the door. But then Kabelo’s friend opened the door, and soon there was a group of their friends standing at the door. “I also want to sit with you, teacher”, said Kabelo’s friend. “And me,” said the other. “And me,” said another. And before I knew it, five of them sat around us. “Why are you only sitting with Kabelo and Kamu? I also want to tell the university people things”, said Kabelo’s friend again. In that moment, struggled to give him a clear answer. I also struggled to ask all of them to leave because I needed to talk to Kamu and Kabelo alone. Tomorrow I will rather take the two boys to the library instead of sitting in the classroom during the break. I will also tell their friends that I will talk to each of them separately because I want to know what they think of Kamu and Kabelo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of my visits, whether to the home or the classroom, church or cemetery, felt like an assault on the senses. I was struck consistently by the complexity of the myriad activities and interactions that were taking place at the same time and my need to capture as much as I could while staying focused on the unit of analysis and the research purpose. Making video recordings of direct observations and writing up notes of visits soon after they were concluded, were ways to capture the happenings ‘thickly’.
Each of the four boys also captured videos and photographs on the mobile phones that were given to them. In addition, I had access to the assessment reports, workbooks, notebooks, learner profiles and in the case of one of the boys, his tablet. This allowed me to identify relevant extracts from the texts and analyse the various applications on the tablet by making notes as I went through each of the applications on his tablet and their mobile phones. Table 3.5 provides a summary of the data sources, data collection and the way I captured the data.
Table 3.5. Summary of data sources, data collection and data capture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Data Capture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Document reviews</td>
<td>Term Assessment Reports</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Excel Spreadsheet of test scores and assessment notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samples from task books</td>
<td></td>
<td>Graphs of test scores in EFAL and Sesotho based on excel spreadsheet data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psycho-Educational Assessment Report</td>
<td></td>
<td>Word clouds of assessment notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learner Profile Reports</td>
<td></td>
<td>Photographs of Learner Profiles and typed up notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DBE Policy Documents:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Photographs of a same of task books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CAPS Foundation Phase White Paper 6 and 7; SIAS Policy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Notes on Psycho-educational Assessment Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DSD Policies</td>
<td></td>
<td>Notes on relevant sections in policy documents related to progression, inclusive education, EFAL and Sesotho CAPS Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECD policies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct observation at various sites</td>
<td>Four boys individually observed in classrooms, on playground, on school outings at their homes at cemetery at church at extra mural activities</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Photographs of site visits Video recordings of site visits Notes at site visits Transcription of a selection of videos and photos of Kabelo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Each of the 4 boys; Class teacher; Both Parents of 3 boys One Parent of 1 boy School Educational Psychologist</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Audio recordings based on an Interview Schedule for each interview. Transcriptions of a selection of audio recordings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic interviews</td>
<td>Each of the mothers on site One father on site Grandfather on site Friends of the boys on site Each of the teachers on site</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Schedule of questions in preparation for site visits Audio recordings Transcriptions of a selection of recordings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group discussions</td>
<td>Four boys Two reading-challenged boys Two mothers</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Parent surveys on media access and use used to guide FGD with mothers Schedule of questions for boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital storytelling workshops</td>
<td>Five Saturday workshops with four boys; one with expert assistance and another with a translator</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Workshop schedules Videos of workshops Workshop notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital artefact review</td>
<td>Four boys’ recordings their stories on the cell phones provided to them. Kabelo’s tablet</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>A range of videos and photos on cell phones given to them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I transcribed audio recordings of interviews and focus group discussions. These transcriptions were done verbatim while being mindful of the challenges that arise with transcribing audio recording as spelt out by Tilley (2003). She highlights the centrality of the transcriber’s interpretive and theoretical lens in influencing the
final text, which becomes the basis for data analysis. In other words, the transcriber makes selections and decisions when deciphering the data from audio recordings. These selections and decision become the final transcribed data. This view of transcriptions as data derived from selections and interpretations made by the transcriber is echoed by Davidson (2009) in her review of three decades of literature on transcriptions as a central practice in qualitative research. In this study, I personally transcribed all interview data. I was guided by Bezemer (2012) on transcribing multimodal interaction when transcribing photographs, the audio of video recordings of activities at various sites, and the video recordings that Kabelo captured on his mobile phone. Transcribing involved listening to the talking language in video recordings and audio recordings and writing them out verbatim, including sounds that are made during speech.

I enlisted the support of a transcriber to assist with the transcription of focus group interviews. The transcriber would consult me from time to time about his interpretation of interviews. The research translator also assisted with the transcription of two interviews that he had conducted, some of which included talk in Sesotho.

3.9 Data analysis: from data to portrait

In Chapter 4, I provide a step by step account of the way the corpus of data was consolidated, coded, categorised and thematised through the employ of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). I also explain how Kabelo’s portrait emerged from the data. To analyse Kabelo’s portrait, I employed activity systems analysis, which I explain next.

3.10 Portrait interpretation using activity systems analysis (ASA)

Activity system analysis (ASA) is derived from cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) as explained by Engeström (1987; 1999; 2001; 2015). It is a heuristic tool with which to analyse the dynamics in an activity system. In the case of this thesis, ASA enabled an analysis of the boychild’s portrait of his everyday play and academic performance, and how they link dialectically and systemically with the social and cultural system in which he is situated. As an analytical and methodological tool,
ASA is underpinned by philosophical and theoretical ideas that originate from classical 18th-century German philosophy (Engeström, 1999).

### 3.10.1 The roots of activity theory (AT)

Activity theory has its origins in Hegelian idealism (Hegel, 2012) and historical and dialectical materialism propounded by Marx and Engels (1970). Under their influence, following the immediate aftermath of the Russian revolution of 1917, Lev Vygotsky, Alexei Leont’ev and Alexander Luria (Engeström, 1999: pp.19-20) and their work on Soviet cultural-historical psychology, led to the development of the classic mediational triangle model of activity upon which subsequent models, permutations and applications within different contexts have developed and spread worldwide. The foundation of this basic mediational triangle model rests on Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of cognition where higher mental function appears on two planes, first on an inter-psychological plane distributed between the individual child and other people, and then within the individual child as an intra-psychological plane (Vygotsky, 1978 p. 57). This basic mediational triangle is depicted in Figure 3.2.

![Figure 3.4. Basic mediational triangle (Vygotsky, 1978)](image)

The original triangular relationship that Vygotsky (ibid) proposed as a way of seeing human activity as being mediated semiotically by signs and tools to achieve an objective that an individual was motivated to achieve. This basic mediational triangle model is referred to as the first-generation activity theory, which focuses
mainly on the individual subject and the vertical development towards higher cognitive functions of the individual (Engeström, 1999). This individual focus was considered a limitation of the first-generation activity theory by Leont’iev (1981), who highlighted the importance of individual action within complex, dynamic and contradictory relationship with collective action, which is why he added the subject who is engaged in activity, in relation to its community, the rules that govern the activity and the division of labour among the various actors intersecting with the subject. The relations in the distribution of labour refer to both ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ relations of power and influence within the object-driven activity system. Leont’iev’s (ibid) version is commonly referred to as second-generation activity theory (AT).

AT gained traction and application widely in the 1970s, as is evident from the volume produced by Engeström, Miettinen, and Punamäki-Gitai (1999). This expansion was accompanied by further critical engagement between different views and perspectives of AT. The fermentation of responses influenced the emergence of a third-generation AT which focused on the need for engagement across different and conflicting viewpoints, interactive networks and multiple activity systems. Engeström (1987; 1999; 2001; 2015) expanded rules, community and division of labour as crucial nodes within a dynamic, complex and contradictory activity system.

Third-generation AT locates the activity system within a social transformational setting centring on historically-accumulating, endemic internal contradictions and
became known as cultural and historical activity theory (CHAT). Engeström (op. cit.) highlights how the transitions and re-organisation of interacting activity systems emerge from these inherent contradictions as it transforms towards an expansive learning system.

Based on five principles, Engeström’s (1987, 2015) third-generation activity theory provides a conceptual framework with which to analyse networks of interactive activity systems. The first principle places the tool-mediated, object-oriented base upon which the network of relations interacts within an activity system, which serves as the *unit of analysis*. The second principle acknowledges the prevalence of many actors and role-players (‘multi-voicedness’). The third principle highlights the historical evolution of a system over time (its ‘historicity’). The fourth principle highlights the internal contradictions that drive change within and between interacting activity systems, while the fifth proclaims the expansive qualitative transformation of the activity system over time (Engeström, 2015).

### 3.10.2 Applying activity systems analysis (ASA) as a heuristic tool

I found activity systems analysis to be a valuable tool for interpreting and analysing the findings in Kabelo’s ethnographic portrait. In ASA, object-oriented, socially-meaningful human activity is the basic unit of analysis. Engeström (1999) alludes to the German word *Tätigkeit* to reflect on the socially-meaningful nature of the activity that is directed by an object and culturally mediated by tools, signs within a relational activity system. To be ‘tätig’ means, literally, to be ‘busy with’ or to be ‘occupied with’ or “engaged” in some activity. This notion aligns with the unit of analysis for this study, which is, firstly, play as a human activity and second,
academic performance as a human activity and the inter-relationships within and between the two (in two activity systems).

Since its introduction by Engeström (1987, 1999, 2015), this type of analysis has informed multiple studies. Some of these include the demonstration of distributed cognition with reference to reading (Cole & Engeström, 1993), human-computer interaction (Kuutti, 1996), student views on social learning (Agherdien & Petersen, 2016), examining case studies of sustainable agricultural practices in southern Africa (Mukute & Lotz-Sisitka, 2012), and the adoption of authentic learning by higher education educators in South Africa (Bozalek, Gachago, Alexander, Watters and Wood, 2013). Building on such applications, I applied ASA with a spotlight on the interaction between two activity systems. One activity system comprises the world of academic performance and the other consists of on the child’s playworld. Within each of the two activity systems, the subject mediates his world through the use of tools and signs, which orients him towards an object that leads to outcomes under given conditions and rules, with particular communities and in a division of labour which varying horizontal and vertical relations of power reside. Figure 3.5 provides a diagrammatic representation of the two interacting activity systems.

![Diagram of two interacting activity systems](image)

Figure 3.7. The structure of a playworld and academic performance as two interacting activity systems (Engeström, 1987, p.78)

The components of this activity “gaze” (Van Oers, Wardekker, Elbers, & Van der Veer, 2008) on human activity in the system of the leading research participant is explained next.
Subject: The subject in the Engeström CHAT/ASA model is an individual or a group with particular experiences, insights perspectives and views, that are situated within and derived from a social, cultural, historical and political milieu. The subject in my study is a child 1) engaged in his playworld activity system and 2) a ‘national learner’ in the world of academic performance activity. In the analysis of Kabelo’s portrait, Kabelo as the subject in both activity systems will also be interpreted within the framing of the theories of recognition and human capabilities, as explained in Chapter 2.

Tools and signs: Engeström (1987; 2001; 2015) explains that tools and signs within a human activity system are derived from the theories of tool mediation espoused by Vygotsky (1978) and Leont’iev (1981) (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). These include technical tools, psychological (cognitive) tools and as added by (Bruner, 1961), iconic tools Amory and Hardman (2014) show that psychological tools also have a cultural foundation and that mediation can be explicit, implicit and all the while also semiotic (symbols and signs in multiple modalities). Explicit mediation refers to the purposeful and intentional use of tools and signs to mediate meaning-making as the object of human activity, whereas implicit mediation refers to the less obvious use of language and communication as semiotic and psychological tools.

In this study, Kabelo’s playworld is mediated through a range of play tools and signs in a variety of signage modes. These play tools include artefacts such as mobile digital devices and mobile applications. They would include cultural tools (which are at the same time signs, exemplified in the symbols of a language) such as the languages that Kabelo speaks. They also include symbols (representations) and signs (serving as tools) that reflect his playworld An example is the word (as a sign of his life, and also a symbol of his lifestyle) kwotas, which is a colloquial reference to a type of food that is sold at a local home-based shop in Soweto, that he enjoys. In his academic performance world, his tools (that he uses) and signs (which he uses and interprets for their representational value) would include the range of academic performance tools such as assessments and tests, and the signs would include the test scores.
**Object:** An activity system is defined by the object (under transformation) that serves to integrate its different elements and drive the activity system. Engeström (1999) alludes to a deeply embedded collective motive that resides in the object of the activity system. He (Engeström, 2001) explains that the object in an activity system is shown by an ‘oval’ symbol in Figure 3.5, indicating that they are ambiguous, surprising and reflect the potential for change. The object under transformation in the child’s playworld is his meaning-making, whereas, in his academic performance world, the object is the basis for progression through the school system according to his measured performance. ‘Meaning-making’ and ‘progression’ will also be analysed through the conceptual clarity provided for these constructs in Chapter 2.

**Rules:** The rules in an activity system refer to the (systemic) norms, laws and policies that govern the subject’s participation in the activity at an individual level and more broadly, at a community and a societal level. In this study, I chose to frame ‘rules’ as the formal global and national laws, policies and regulations that govern the subject's object-oriented mediation of tools and signs in both his playworld and his academic performance world. They include policies on children’s rights, children’s play and children’s education, which will be analysed in relation to Kabelo as the subject in both systems. These rules are defined by global and national systems. I also highlight informal rules that are developed and defined by Kabelo as the subject and his community.

**Community:** The element of ‘community’ in ASA refers to individuals and sub-groups who share the same object in the activity system. In both activity systems, the members of Kabelo’s community are his parents, relatives, friends, peers and teachers. They share the object of meaning-making in his playworld activity system as well as in his academic performance activity system, where they share the object of progression through the school system.

**Division of labour:** The negotiation of responsibilities, tasks and power relations, both vertically or unequally, and horizontally, is what defines the division of the labour node in an activity system (Engeström, 2001). In this way, ASA adds to the theories of recognition and capabilities, the power relations dynamic which, for some, like Roberts (2016), is missing from the capabilities approach. It also
incorporates the role of adults as parents and teachers as intermediaries, as demonstrated by Zelezny-Green's (2018) model of a girl-centred choice framework, through which there can be both horizontal and vertical power relations. In this study, Kabelo shares horizontal ties with his community as well as unequal or vertical power relations with some of his peers and adults as decision-makers within his playworld and academic performance world as two interacting activity systems.

**Outcome**: The outcomes are derived from the semiotic mediation of the tools and signs by the subject that gives rise to the systems object. Regarding the evolution of the subject’s meaning-making through play, his play capabilities are the outcome of his playworld activity system whereas, in his academic performance activity system, the development of skills and competencies required to progress through the schooling system, are the outcomes of the system. Figure 3.5 shows different activity systems mediated by different tools, different forms of the subject with different objects and outcomes. However, the rules, community, and divisions of labour in both are similar.

### 3.10.3 Dialectical contradictions and system transformation

ASA emphasises two critical methodological concepts - contradictions as dialectics and system transformation as learning expansion. Engeström (2001) refers to *contradictions* as disturbances that deviate from standard scripts that have the potential to change the system. An activity system is perpetually unstable and is chiefly driven by internal contradictions. These contradictions are “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). Identifying the contradictions becomes a basis for understanding the root causes of systemic disturbances and also becomes the precondition for revisioning and transforming the system. Engeström (2015, p. 70) further theorises contradictions as a clash between individual actions and the total activity system. He identifies levels of contradictions within and between activity systems. They include:

1. Primary contradictions, which arise *within* nodes in the activity system, for example, within the rules of the activity system;
2. Secondary contradictions, which arise when there are tensions *between* different nodes in the system such as, between the rules and the subject;
3. Tertiary contradictions, which arise when there is tension between an old activity system and a more recent or evolved activity system; and
4. Quaternary contradictions, which arise when there is tension between the central activity of the one activity system and one or more interacting activity systems.

In the application of ASA, I will give prominence to the principle of internal contradictions within and between the academic performance and playworld activity systems. I acknowledge two studies that drew attention to contradictions in their application of ASA. Sak's (2019) study of Grade 1 mathematics classrooms in five Malawian primary schools analysed primary and secondary contradictions and found that the adversarial conditions for learning in overcrowded classrooms of up to 160 young learners gave rise to such extreme tensions that the classroom can only be described as a whole failed system. The children played out expansive learning during their long walks from the school where they would apply some of the concepts that the teacher tried to teach. These children discarded the formal classroom learning system and created their informal system playfully once they left school in the afternoon. Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2008) synthesised studies on information and communication technologies (ICT) in education that utilised activity theory and the principle of contradictions in order to explore prospects for the transformation through ICT in education adoption. Murphy and Manzanares (2008) provide further analysis of contradictions from the viewpoint of the teachers who were transitioning from a physical to a virtual high school classroom system. They identified time, workload, the physical presence of the teacher in their interaction with students and their rapport-building roles as the central contradictions that emerged between the two systems which were explained by the contradiction between the different tools used in each system.

While acknowledging these approaches and findings, I accentuate Engeström and Sannino's (2011) more in-depth interrogation of the notion of contradictions in activity systems and their role in driving change and transformation. They bring attention to the nebulous, atheoretical and ahistorical ways in which the term have been applied and make attempts at providing further conceptual clarity.
Contradictions cannot be observed directly; they can only be identified through their manifestations (Engeström & Sannino, 2011, p. 369).

They draw a distinction between contradictions conceptualised within the frame of formal logic (A versus not-A) and dialectical contradictions. The latter is derived from the Marxian theory of dialectical materialism which engages beyond that which is merely opposite, paradoxical, inconsistent or in conflict. Dialectical contradictions are also not the same as dilemmas or double binds. Dialectical contradictions emerge historically and systemically. Engeström and Sannino (op.cit) suggest, therefore, that contradictions are better understood as discursive manifestations. In this respect, they offer a methodological framework in which four types of discursive manifestations of contradictions are identified. Each includes specific features, associated linguistic cues, and possible ways in which the contradiction can be resolved. This framework is depicted in Table 3.5. Engeström and Sannino (ibid) emphasise that the types of contradictions identified do not represent an exhaustive list. They also stress that critical conflicts and double binds were found to be particularly effective lenses on systemic contradictions. I utilised the schema offered in Table 3.5 in the analysis of discursive manifestations of contradictions within and between the playworld and academic performance world as two interacting activity systems.

Table 3.8. Types of discursive manifestations of contradictions (Engeström & Sannino, 2011, p.375)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manifestation</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Linguistic cues</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Double bind</td>
<td>Facing pressing and equally unacceptable alternatives in an activity system:</td>
<td>“we”, “us”, “we must”, “we have to” pressing rhetorical questions, expressions of helplessness “let us do that”, “we will make it.”</td>
<td>Practical transformation (going beyond words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical conflict</td>
<td>Facing contradictory motives in social interaction, feeling violated or guilty</td>
<td>Personal, emotional, moral accounts narrative structure, vivid metaphors “I now realise that[...]”</td>
<td>Finding new personal sense and negotiating a new meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>Arguing, criticising</td>
<td>“no”, “I disagree”, “this is not true” “yes”, “this I can accept”</td>
<td>Finding a compromise, submitting to authority or majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dilemma</td>
<td>Expression or exchange of incompatible evaluations</td>
<td>“on the one hand[...], on the other hand”; “yes, but” “I didn’t mean that”, “I actually meant”</td>
<td>Denial, reformulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In applying the framework proposed in Table 3.6, I sought to identify relevant ‘raw’ linguistic cues which would lead to identifying features and the related
manifestation of contradictions. I derived this approach from the way Engeström and Sannino (ibid) applied this model to an organisational change intervention at a municipal home care facility for the elderly in Helsinki in 2008 and 2009.

While contradictions can open up the potential for transformation of activity systems, such transformation can also be disabled by contradictions. For them to play an expansive, transformative role, Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2008) suggest that the contradictions will need to be acknowledged. They state further that transformation will need to take place at the system level and cannot take place at an individual level, which resonates with the conclusions drawn by Engeström and Sannino (2011), that resolution will be found through collective, systemic effort.

Engeström (2005) proposed the concept of expansive learning which arises out of ways to address the systems’ internal contradictions. He also offers a methodology related to expansive learning, known as Developmental Work Research, which can be applied in the design of interventions that are centred on change and innovation. Engeström (2005) explains that expansive learning takes place in discursive spaces which involve resistance, questioning and debate, a context of discovery that involves experimentation and modelling, and a context of the practical social application that involves the integration of communities. In doing so, the system itself evolves and navigates its development through its zones of proximal development (ZPD). Engeström applies the Vygotskian concept of the ZPD to a system’s learning process compared with Vygotsky’s use of the concept about the learning process of an individual child. Engeström thus beckons towards a model that enable practitioners to intervene in a given activity system, in order to transform it towards expansive learning. He identifies seven stages of expansive learning (Engeström, 2015, p.xxi) as a methodology for applying a change framework to systems. While the application of these stages of ASA is beyond the scope of this study, I identify a systems ZPD through which the identified contradictions can be addressed.

3.11 The trustworthiness of the research

Miles et al., (2020) bring attention to the way Lincoln and Guba (1985) replaced conventional scientific inquiry terminology to rigour, reliability and validity with terms like dependability, credibility and transferability when evaluating the quality
and trustworthiness of qualitative research. Although these terms do not necessarily have to replace conventional terms, they do adjust one’s thinking to some degree. They also provide strategies to improve trustworthiness. These include

- Being involved in the field intensively for over 16 months;
- Triangulation through the use of a range of research sources and methods;
- Transcription of interviews and focus group discussions;
- Member checking; and
- Thick descriptions.

The research of this study was conducted over 17 months, which helped to clarify distortions that invariably arose. As a measure of trustworthiness for the research project, a range of data sources, different data collection methods, and different data types were included in the research plan. In this way, data could be cross-referenced for accuracy and distortions, and contradictions could be identified. While I was able to take notes while recording the conversations during interviews and focus group discussions, I had not made use of a few observers when I was engaged in direct observation, as suggested by Denzin (2001). I was, however, able to debrief with the research assistant who served as translator on some of the home visits we did together. In this way I could adjust my interpretations of particular activities that arose, based on the insights gleaned from these debriefing discussions.

I also spent time away from sites in order to create distance with the research participants. Furthermore, I employed member checking strategies by sending transcripts of interviews to interviewees to confirm whether their views and comments were portrayed correctly. I also checked with Kabelo and his mother, whether his portrait was captured accurately.

To ensure the possible transferability of the research and the findings, I also provided thickly described narratives, leaving an ‘audit trail’ or a ‘chain of evidence’ so that the reliability of procedures could be followed to some degree. In this way, the research design and genres could be replicated to support other studies. Moreover, I was also able to establish an audit trail of research instruments, documentation and transcripts to support the transferability of the research.
3.12 Researcher positionality and reflexivity

The researcher is also a research instrument and the relationship between the researcher, the research participants, and the situated social construction of the knowledge production process is also complex. The reference to this role of the researcher is widely cited in the qualitative research literature (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2012; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2020) in general and in the range of research genres chosen for this study. Henning et al. (2004, p.13) also allude to the importance of the researcher’s reflexive knowledge and the manifestation of politics and ideology in research.

I have already remarked on these complexities in my discussion about the location and role of the researcher in critical ethnography, narrative inquiry and portraiture. These also beckon the importance of calling out and highlighting how my positionality as the researcher influenced the research process and the reflexivity required in managing the complex social relations that invariably arose on the research journey. I was aware that the generational, class, cultural, linguistic and geographic differences between myself and the boy-children were conspicuous throughout the research process, and that they had a bearing both on my perceptions and interpretations of events and situations, and the way I was perceived by the research participants. Being considered as ‘family’, sister, ‘confidante’, and ‘social worker’ in the face of domestic problems, by the mothers of the boy-children, and being seen as an aunty, teacher, and friend by the boys, meant that I had to navigate the boundaries of my role as the scientist, the researcher carefully. This proved to be a complex and challenging endeavour. I also learned that acknowledging my positionality and reflexivity is also not a neutral, uncritical way of legitimising claims to research validity. Bradbury and Clark (2012) note that power relations manifest in the research process and the way the experiences of research participants are interpreted and portrayed. This requires attention to and acknowledgement of how the privileges and inequalities informed the interpretations and conclusions drawn by the researcher.

I made conscious attempts to acknowledge and manage dilemmas that arose for my role as a researcher while in the field. Fieldnotes and researcher reflections were tools that I employed during fieldwork to support my reflexivity. The emotional...
connection that I made with all four boys and their mothers also presented a research dilemma. Brak-Lamy (2012, p. 5), quoting Hovland (2007), states that “emotions are often left out of anthropological research methods courses, they are edited out of ethnographic texts and are treated with uncertainty, embarrassment or silence”. She states further that emotions are often dismissed, deleted, obscured, and joked about in anthropological research. A few qualitative researchers have challenged attempts like these to sanitise fieldwork by obscuring the role of the researcher’s emotions in the field. Punch (2010) argues, for example, that guilt, apprehension fears, worries and frustrations, are legitimate, common and useful experiences of fieldwork which is why she proposed the use of ‘field diaries’ as opposed to ‘field notes’ to render greater visibility to these encounters. In support, Lund (2010) also shows how emotions are cultural constructions and that researchers who make themselves vulnerable and acknowledge their emotions produce research that strengthens their relationships with researchers and produce intelligent insights.

Emotions are not something to be monitored in a research setting or reflected in a disengaged way. Instead, they are the source of all our thinking…integral to the relations within our world and the people within it. (Burkitt, 2012, p. 461, quoted in Pocock 2016, p. 32)

In trying to make sense of her own emotional entanglements in a project on understanding of the concept of home for long term travellers, Pocock (ibid) reflects on the way the illumination of her emotional involvement strengthened the reliability of the research in that it allowed her to articulate the researcher’s authority, representation, power and balance of voice. She calls for the emotions to be placed at the centre of the researcher’s reflexivity. With this in mind, I was keen to engage with my subjectivity, reflexivity and positionality as a qualitative researcher by inculcating a reflective practice before and during fieldwork, in the way I represent the findings and research participants in my analysis and the presentation of the research. I reflected particularly on critical incidents that arose by documenting my emotions as a researcher in the field. In my regular reflective field notes, I would mainly document critical incidents that triggered me emotionally, and I would reflect on my responses in these settings. One such incident arose when the mother of one of the four boys broke down during an interview with me when she related how she was beaten by her husband. She showed me photographs that she took of herself.
My reflective notes acknowledged my emotional, empathetic response and the strategies that I tried to apply in the moment in my attempt to also maintain the boundaries of my role as a researcher. For example, in this incident, I felt emotionally engaged and morally obliged to connect her to People Opposing Woman Abuse (POWA), an organisation that offers support services to women and children who are exposed to domestic violence and sexual assault. POWA offered their services at Baragwanath hospital in Soweto, which made the connection possible. In this way, I harnessed the social connections at my disposal in support of one of the mothers. This was a moment when I was able to be supportive. On other occasions, I was more able to say no to requests that were made to me. These critical incidents also raised ethical issues which I turn to next.

3.13 Research ethics

The study articulated an awareness of the potential ethical risks associated with conducting research with and about children. These include, among other things:

- That the research could provide undue and unwanted exposure for the children and their families and potentially place them at risk;
- That the researcher may uncover confidences revealed by the children participants that may be ethically compromising; and
- That the caring adults may ask for information about the children, which may breach confidentiality between the children participants and the researcher.

The research engaged with different models and experiences of ethical research on children. These include the United Nations Children’s Fund (2015) *UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis* and the model provided by *Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC)* (Graham, Powell, Taylor, Anderson, & Fitzgerald, 2013). Guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), their approach acknowledges how the researcher’s decision-making along the research journey on and with children, is consistently and continuously influenced by the researcher’s values, experiences, attitudes and beliefs. They encourage researchers to be open, reflexive and collaborative, and they propose that the relational dimension of research ethics be considered. They further propose the adoption of three principles:
respect, benefit and justice, which they clarify in greater detail and guide researchers on how to apply these principles. They also provide some case studies on the application of these principles and the challenges that researchers have confronted. In summary, they

- Acknowledge the right of children to have a say and be heard;
- Assume that research be undertaken in partnership with caring adults;
- underline the value of research that focuses on promoting understanding and improvement of the lives of children; and
- Advocate for research that engages critically with the principles of respect, benefit and justice in research ethics.

Graham et al. (op. cit) also subscribe to the International Charter on Ethical Research Involving Children. In applying these models of ethical research, I explained the research objectives and process in detail to the mothers, fathers and boy-children separately at meetings dedicated for this purpose. These meetings invited questions, comments, criticisms and suggestions from research participants. Brief written summaries of the research process including activities and timelines were also provided to participants to provide further clarity. Following these consultations, all of the participants provided their formal written consent to participate in English. The parents signed on behalf of the boy-children as legal minors. However, the boy-children were also regarded as agents and decision-makers in their own right. Consent was therefore also sought from the four boys in particular after it has been clearly explained to them what they can expect. They expressed their commitment to participate for the duration of the study. There were also given the option to opt-out at any time. The research was also granted an ethical clearance number from the University of Johannesburg, which is 2018-061. The ethical clearance certificate is available in Appendix A.

While following these ethical procedures were necessary, being in the field required vigilance to the potential and actual ethical dilemmas that invariably arose. One example of an ethical dilemma involved being asked for money to support a difficult financial situation in one of the homes. In this situation, I declined the request because I felt that it would compromise my role as researcher, it would shift my
relationship with the research participant, and it could be seen as being unfair to the rest of the research participants. I utilised the ERIC framework as a guide during such ethical dilemmas, and I would acknowledge the difficulties I sometimes experienced with declining requests for support. In these ways, the quest to maintain the ethical research protocols proved to be a complex and challenging endeavour which I integrated consciously in my attempts to maintain and sustain research rigour and trustworthiness.

3.14 Summary

Because this thesis aims to provide a thick, deep and rich ethnographic portrait of an underperforming boychild and the way he makes meaning of his everyday world of play, and his world of academic performance, it required a qualitative research methodology design. The latter incorporates a blend of critical, digital and multi-sited ethnography with portraiture as a form of narrative inquiry. Because this study is also framed within a social justice orientation, its embrace of standpoint epistemology further supports a design that enables the voice and agency of the research participants. I explained how the use of data collection strategies such as digital storytelling is an attempt to enable the active agential participation of the research participants. I further explained my adoption of activity systems analysis and its related methodology on contradictions within and between two activity systems, to analyse the research findings. With these lenses, I crafted the narrative portrait, which is provided in the next chapter.
4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3, I discussed the research design choices I made to craft Kabelo’s critical ethnographic narrative portrait. I explained how a particular blend of research genres framed the development of appropriate qualitative data collection methods and instruments. These instruments supported the production of a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, pp3-30) of Kabelo’s under-studied playworld as a social justice project. Integrally linked to the study’s hybridised research design, this chapter relates the analytical and synthesising journey I took from processing the voluminous data collected over 16 months up to the creation of Kabelo’s data-rich portrait. Figure 4.1 a-d, maps this data analysis journey from data to portrait. First, I show how I engaged the data through theoretical sampling and coding, and through constant comparison with analytic memos (Charmaz, 2014) to produce 1251 codes, as shown in Figure 4.1a.
Then I explain how I engaged in constant comparison (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Charmaz, 2014) during the coding process and developed 39 categories from the codes, as shown in Figure 4.1b.

Next, I explain how I arrived at 10 themes that were derived from the 39 categories, as shown in Figure 4.1c.

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**Figure 4.1b. Codes to categories**

**Figure 4.1c. Categories to themes**
Finally, I show how I derived from the ten themes, five overarching concepts, as shown in Figure 4.1d.

Figure 4.1d. From themes to overarching concepts

Figure 4.1d provides the whole map from theoretical sampling to Kabelo’s portrait. Figures 4.1 a to 4.1d show how I combined Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory methodology with the techniques provided by Saldana (2016) and Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2019), on analysing qualitative research data. I will now proceed with an explanation of how I began the data analysis journey with theoretical sampling.

4.2 Theoretical sampling: choosing to study Kabelo

Over the 17 months, commencing August 2017, I systematically explored the everyday play of four 9–10-year-old boys. I joined them on school outings; journeyed with them in and across a range of contexts; interviewed them individually and held focus group discussions with them, their mothers, fathers and friends; involved them in digital story-telling workshops; and examined their digital artefacts and stories. The
activities meant that I had some form of contact with them on average once per week during the school term.

While each of the four boys presented unique insights into their respective playworlds, I was most intrigued by Kabelo. This prompted me to follow a process of theoretical sampling, as explained by Charmaz (2014, p192). She explains that theoretical sampling prompts the researcher to take a new path, especially if tentative categories and incomplete ideas are emerging. Theoretical sampling also refers to seeking and sampling relevant data to refine emerging codes and categories. I was not necessarily taking a 'new path', although the possible categories that were already taking shape early on in the fieldwork, explicitly about his playworld, inspired a keener interest for more in-depth exploration.

Kabelo presented a particular condition of ‘underperformance’ that captivated my research interest — his specific academic struggles at school, contrasted with particular forms of play in his everyday playworld. Kabelo not only repeated the Grade 1 year of schooling but also demonstrated in class, how he struggled with reading and writing in English and in Sesotho. Right at the outset of my fieldwork, I realised that Kabelo’s underperformance was influencing the school authorities to recommend his departure from the school where much of my study was based. He was the only child in the second grade of 70 children who risked being asked to leave the school, due to his perceived lack of progress. The combination of these factors provoked my interest. Because of what appeared to be an ‘extreme case’ I applied theoretical sampling by choosing to focus primarily on him for this study. I wanted to explore the emerging categories related to his play, performance and eventual evacuation from the school. I realised during my initial fieldwork, that such a study held the promise illuminating insight regarding the study’s purpose. My decision to shift the sample from four boys to a deep-dive ethnographic portrait of one of the boys is also reminiscent of Miles, Huberman and Saldana’s (2019) reference to condensation as part of the data capturing and analysis process. I chose to condense the data analysis process from a focus on four participants to a substantive ethnographic portrait of one boy. I then proceeded to code the extensive data about Kabelo’s playworld, as an iterative process of analysing and synthesising data, beginning with coding.
4.3 Coding fieldwork data

Methodologists of qualitative research, such as Silverman (2000, 2011), Denzin & Lincoln (2000, 2013), Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014), Henning, Van Rensburg, and Smit (2004) and Charmaz (2005; 2014), view coding of ‘raw’ data as a heuristic that enables the researcher to work analytically and synthetically with data. While there are different ways of coding inductively, such as, in grounded theory, it involves organising and ‘slicing’ data into segments, asking analytical questions and attaching a label to individual chunks of texts. In a deductive coding project, the process is similar, but the codes are not generated by the researcher (only) and originate from a model or a theory. Attaching a label or code is a crucial, interpretive, inferential, and analytical step in the process of inductive coding. The researcher interprets and makes inferences about the chunk of text by awarding it, it a code according to the researcher’s interpretation/understanding. In this way, the researcher makes a judgement call. In this way, the researcher’s knowledge of the topic, her personality, predisposition and subjectivities influence her inferences and judgements (Saldana, 2016).

Below I explain how I coded the data over time, starting with initial coding, using analytic memos and constant comparisons of codes, and progressing on to focused coding. I draw on Charmaz’s (2014) differentiation between initial coding and focused coding. According to Charmaz, initial coding takes place in the initial phases of the fieldwork when the researcher continues to engage with the research participants. She also states that during initial coding, the researcher is still making sense of the field, developing a ‘feel’ for the data and the direction of the research.

For Charmaz, focused coding takes place when the fieldwork has advanced, and the researcher can be more selective with the most useful initial codes against which the most significant codes are compared. In this way, the grounded theory method of coding is emergent, iterative, progressive and constructivist. It is a process of interpretation, inference and meaning-making that journeys in back and forth movement between concrete ‘grounded’ data towards higher levels of conceptual abstraction (Charmaz, 2014).

I applied as appropriate, different forms of, in vivo coding, ‘processual’ coding, and ‘versus’ coding, as explained by Saldana (2016). When doing in vivo coding, I
made use of the words of the participant as code. When doing ‘processual’ coding, I allocated codes as actions or processes by encoding actions in the gerund of verbs used as nouns of activity. I implemented ‘versus’ coding when capturing the contrasts and contradictions as they arose in the data.

Charmaz (ibid) states that writing analytic memos along the data analysis journey serve as crucial moments of analysis and reflection for the researcher. Analytic memos are reflective notes written by the researcher during field world. For me, they served a variety of purposes. Charmaz suggests that they can be ‘notes to self’ for the researcher and that they can catalyse hunches and intuitions. They can also enable the documentation of surprises and questions that emerge for the researcher. Charmaz (ibid) believes that analytic memos capture the comparisons and connections that the researcher makes between the various data, the emerging codes and categories and the emerging theoretical propositions. I provide some examples below of how I integrated analytic memos during the coding process.

Importantly too, I show the moments when I consulted the extant literature along the data collection and analysis journey. Sometimes the analytic memos prompted searches in the literature. I emphasise, though, that I also started with an initial exploration of literature related to anticipated codes and categories. Once the inter-related themes became evident, they became relevant concepts for searching and engaging the relevant empirical and theoretical literature.

The journey culminated with the creation of themes from the prominent categories, as shown in Figure 4.1 (a, b, c and d). I show how I developed 38 categories from the coded data from which ten salient themes emerged. Themes are generally described as categories that operate at a higher level of abstraction. Charmaz quotes personal communication with Clarke and her reference to themes being categories with ‘carrying capacity’ (2014, p.247). From the identification of the arising themes, their interrelationship is discussed and within this, the emergence of theoretical propositions that reflect in Kabelo’s portrait.

Following this overview of the data analysis map above, I now turn to the coding process that I followed. Below are examples of how I applied initial coding and focused coding over an illustrated spectrum of data collection methods. It includes examples of coding data from
4.4 Initial coding

Kabelo became part of the sample of four boys in my study because his teacher advised at the outset that he met my purposeful sampling criteria. My first discussion with his teacher took place during a planned classroom observation session where I was going to meet her and select two of the four boys from her class.

4.4.1 Coding a classroom observation

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the allocation of initial codes to field notes on my first classroom observation. I used in vivo coding, which makes use of the words of the participants as codes (Saldana, 2016).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text: Classroom observation 24 August 2017</th>
<th>Initial In-Vivo Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| At this point, I spoke to the teacher: a quiet, soft-spoken young Sesotho-speaking woman. I explained my research purpose and that I needed to identify two boys in her class, whom she considered as underperforming boys. She immediately mentions Kabelo and Kamu. She points them out as they walk towards the door. She tells me that Kabelo would be an interesting case because he had repeated Grade 1. He was struggling with English, with reading and he was struggling with Sesotho. She thought that he should repeat Grade 2 as well but the system does not allow for a grade to be repeated twice in one phase of education. So, he will have to progress on to Grade 3. The other boy, Kamu, is also struggling but he is not 'as bad'. He also repeated Grade 1. He also struggled with reading in both languages. He is very quiet in class as well. | Identifying Kabelo

"had repeated Grade 1"
"struggling with English"
"struggling with reading: "struggling with Sesotho"
"should repeat Grade 2"
"progress to Grade 3"

Identifying Kamu

"also struggling"
"not as bad"
"also repeated Grade 1"
"also struggled with reading in both languages."
"Very quiet in class as well"
These codes revealed the teacher’s understanding of Kabelo’s academic challenges. At the outset, they began to influence the narratives related to Kabelo’s academic underperformance. In keeping with grounded theory methodology, these initial codes were compared continuously with codes allocated to successive data gathered from document reviews, focus group discussions and interviews with Kabelo.

4.4.2 Coding document reviews

Below is an example of initial codes that emerged subsequently, from my review of policy documents and Kabelo’s academic reports. With the latter, I aggregated the assessment comments by his teacher, across all term reports that I had received between 2015 and 2017. I pasted the aggregated text into a word cloud application called WordArt.com (2017) to create word-clouds of data about his recorded assessment outcomes in the school. Two word-clouds were generated, as shown in Figure 4.2. Here I took heed from McNaught and Lam (2010) who advised that word clouds are visualisation tools which demonstrate the most frequently-used words that are shown through greater prominence in the word cloud. They advise, though, that while word clouds are useful as a preliminary tool to provide a basic understanding of the data, it is not a stand-alone content analysis method. I used word clouds for this purpose, as a visualised preview into the data.

Table 4.2. Word clouds and graph on Kabelo’s term report assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures</th>
<th>Initial Processual Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Word Cloud](image.png) | Not competent  
Not achieving  
Not promoted |

*Figure 4.2 Assessment Decisions: 2015-2017*
The word clouds highlight the most used words which I appropriated as initial codes. I also created graphs of his test scores over time and paired them with the word clouds. Evident from the word clouds are the most frequent uses of the words ‘achieved’, ‘promoted’, and ‘competent’, but these are words that are combined with ‘not’.

Already these initial codes were revealing scenes from Kabelo’s world of performance, from the perspective of the education system. Here my analytic memos also revealed my need to review the curriculum and assessment policy statements (CAPS) for the Foundation Phase as well as the Department of Basic Education’s (DBE) progression policy. These examples demonstrate how I have also compared...
initial codes with further initial codes as the emerged from the data over time, as guided by Charmaz (2014).

Table 4.3 provides a snapshot of the initial processual codes generated from my review of the Department of Basic Education, (2013) policy on progression and promotion in the Foundation Phase. With processual coding, one uses codes as gerunds, which also denotes an action (Saldana, 2016).

Table 4.3 Example of initial coding of policy document review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text: DBE Policy Document on Progression</th>
<th>Initial Processual Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“A learner who does not meet the requirements for promotion can be progressed to the next grade in order to prevent the learner being retained in the Foundation Phase for longer than four years, excluding Grade R.” (2012, p8)</td>
<td>Not meeting requirements Preventing retention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My initial encounters with the adults in Kabelo’s life and the system’s rules and policies, were useful in generating codes related to his academic performance. Already in the initial phase of the field work, my codes were giving me leads on what to pursue in subsequent data collection, as advised by Charmaz (2014, p121). To further understand his world of performance, I later asked for a sample of his notebooks and his Learner Profile. I show below how I applied processual coding to the text from his Learner Profile and how reviewing his notebook led to an analytic memo, which was also coded.

Table 4.4. Initial coding of a slice of text from Kabelo’s Learner Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text: Kabelo’s Learner Profile</th>
<th>Initial Processual Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24.05.17. TEACHER: Kabelo is still struggling with reading and writing and needs intense support for both languages. 02.06.17 TEACHER: Kabelo is continuing, but we need to find the real cause for his barrier to reading and writing. Kabelo is still to cope with the workload in Grade 2 and is receiving support from the teacher.</td>
<td>Still struggling Continuing Needing intense support Finding real cause Still need to cope</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20 A Learner Profile is a comprehensive, cumulative record of a learner during his life at school. For the Gauteng Education Department (GDE) it is holistic representation of a learner’s qualities that provide information about strengths and areas that need support as continuously observed by educators. Appended to the Profile are a range of relevant documents that contribute towards an understanding of the learner (Department of Basic Education, 2014).
When reviewing his Sesotho notebook with his tests neatly pasted inside, as shown in Table 4.5, my analytic memos expressed surprise that he achieved a high mark for comprehension and that he demonstrated a weaker score for phonics.

Table 4.5. Initial coding of a review of Sesotho class test assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XXX Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sesotho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date: 10 March 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marks: 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer the questions and write neatly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Marks</th>
<th>Learner's Marks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mark achieved: 30/60

I realised that I needed to interview his teacher and the school psychologist and that I needed to hear his mother’s views on Kabelo’s performance. Importantly, I needed to listen to Kabelo’s voice and views on his academic performance. Concurrent with my exploration of these perspectives on Kabelo’s academic performance, I also needed to ensure that I remained guided by my research questions and research purpose.
4.4.3 Coding text from an interview with Kabelo

Aware that my research question was, “Who is the township boy-child who is ostensibly under-performing academically?”, I continued on my journey to get to know the Kabelo behind his test scores and underperforming assessment outcomes. I drew on his further introduction to me during our brief chat on the school outing to the Johannesburg zoo on 6 September 2017. I had a subsequent interview with him on 10 September 2017. I asked the research translator, also a male who could speak Sesotho, to engage Kabelo in an interview which took place on 1 October 2017. I illustrate my codes with a slice of the transcribed data below:

Table 4.6. Initial coding from a focus group discussion: I am Kabelo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text: Interview with Kabelo, 1 October 2017</th>
<th>Initial In-vivo Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Koketso: Please remove your hand from your mouth so that I can hear you clearly. Where do you live? Kabelo: Dobsonville</td>
<td>lives with “mudder and daddy and younger younger brudder”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koketso: You live in Dobsonville. Ok who lives with you in your home? Kabelo: My mudder and my daddy and my younger younger brudder..........</td>
<td>“play with my friends”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koketso: I play with my friends. Another of my friend is keeper another, my friend is keeper. We play we play different cup err this one is Kabelo: Different</td>
<td>“soccer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koketso: Ja. This one is Pirate this one is Chiefs Kabelo: Oh, different teams</td>
<td>“This one is Pirate this one is Chiefs”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koketso: Yes Kabelo: Oh ok. So where is your favourite place or room in your home? Kabelo: It’s at at the ground this side</td>
<td>“Favourite place in home is garage”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koketso: No in your home inside the house what is your favourite place in your house? Kabelo: It’s garage garage</td>
<td>“because it has many space”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These codes piqued my interest in Kabelo, particularly the need to hear and see more about his life at home, at school and in between. Following initial introductions, I next compared existing codes to the codes that emerged from my participant observation of our first journey from school to his grandfather’s home in Moletsane.
4.4.4 Coding text from participant observation notes

Table 4.7 provides an example of my initial codes for data from a participant observation incident. The incident involves a drive in my car from Pimville to Moletsane, which was led by Kabelo. Here I demonstrate my use of versus coding where I contrast one code in comparison with another as explained by (Saldana, 2016).

Table 4.7. Initial coding: participant observation of a drive through Soweto

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text: Participant observation: Talk on the Drive to Moletsane</th>
<th>Initial In-vivo, Versus &amp; Processual Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kabelo: I know the way to my grandfadder's place</td>
<td>“I know the way” vs the GPS shows the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shafika: That’s wonderful because I am so bad with directions. This is why I use this GPS.</td>
<td>“My grandfather’s place” Shopping at Maponya Mall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabelo: At the robot turn left</td>
<td>“tekkies and socks” and “Steers burgers at Maponya”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabelo: See, there is Maponya Mall (excitedly). My mudder buy me tekkies and socks at Maponya Mall. You must not wear tekkies without socks. Sometimes my mudder buy me Steers burgers at Maponya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabelo: At the garage, turn left and then you turn right and then you are at my grandfadder’s house. My grandfadder’s house is a tavern. But he does not drink. He is a pastor. We are going to church on Sunday to celebrate him.</td>
<td>“At the garage, turn left” “grandfadder's house is a tavern” “does not drink” “He is a pastor” “Going to church” Tavern vs church Selling alcohol vs not drinking alcohol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My analytic memo following this incident with Kabelo reveals my astonishment at his spatial knowledge of Soweto and his navigational skills, his confident use of English whilst in the car; taking charge of leading us to his grandfather's home; and his explanation of life at his grandfather's home and the centrality of his grandfather in his life.

I have provided a snapshot of examples of how I applied initial coding to the beginning phases of my fieldwork and the data that emerged from this. I have given examples of initial in vivo coding of data from initial classroom observations; an interview with Kabelo; and participation observation notes. I have also given examples of how I applied processual coding from data based on document reviews including Kabelo’s Learner Profile; and participation observation notes. I further provided examples of applying versus coding to participant observation data. I will now demonstrate how I applied focused coding.
4.5 Focused coding

Consistent with the view that it is advisable not to start field work and data analysis with a tabula rasa, I had read some initial literature to guide my thinking. I started, based on a preliminary reading of the literature, with lifeworld as an overarching theoretical concept. However, my fieldwork consistently led me to playworld as a concept which defines Kabelo’s lifeworld. The notion of ‘playworld’ also emerged from the data that followed the drive through Soweto under Kabelo’s guidance. These include more drives together through Soweto; visits to the different places he calls home; a visit to the cemetery; interviews with his mother, father and grandfather; and following our digital story-telling workshops; the storyboards, videos and photographs that followed. His lifeworld was tinged with elements of play, of imagining and creating navigation paths through his multi-layered reality.

Playworld, as a concept, emerged originally as a way to describe the ‘world’ which involves the place and space where play activity happens. Greater Soweto emerged, in this way, as a big playground in Kabelo’s playworld. This term began to influence my thinking at the outset and particularly when applying focused coding. Kabelo was ‘playing on the ‘stage’ (Veresov, 2004) of cultural life on the ‘stage’ of his extended playground. I now provide examples of how I coded different data forms by way of focused coding.

4.5.1 Coding photographs

Table 4.8 shows codes that were allocated to photographs taken on one of my home visits to Kabelo’s Moletsane home. It highlights codes that relate to Kabelo’s Soweto as his playground, and within this, the significance of his grandfather’s home. Here I responded to the images and provided codes based on my interpretation of the images, both semantically and semiotically as applied by Henning (2003).
Table 4.8. Coding photographs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Focused In Vivo &amp; Processual Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kabelo was playing with <em>WordSearch</em>, an app on his mother’s mobile phone. Mother: This is good. It teaches him how to spell English words Shafika: Did you download it? Kabelo: No Shafika: Do you play that game Kabelo: Sometimes. (playing on the app) Shafika: Do you like it? Kabelo: No (shaking head) Shafika: But it’s a good game. Your mother did a good thing. Do you agree? Kabelo: No</td>
<td>Playing <em>WordSearch</em> “teaches him how to spell.” Not liking the game Disagreeing that it is a good game</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analytic memo:** Kabelo’s mother said that he downloaded the app, but it turns out that she did it for him and it seems she imposed it on him and he plays it reluctantly. When he demonstrated how he plays with it he showed how he tried to get the right letters sometimes and for some words he was adept at finding the right spelling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extant literature: (Findlay &amp; Ogbu, 2011)</th>
<th>Township housing are urban reserves of black labour Sterile design Spaces of control Control of movement Renovation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Townships served as urban reserves of black labour for burgeoning manufacturing industry. The sterile design of township-style houses was referred to as <em>matchbox houses</em>. It formed part of the design of townships as spaces of Apartheid control over the movement of people classified as black, across South Africa. Since then people have renovated and redesigned their homes.</td>
<td>Township housing are urban reserves of black labour Sterile design Spaces of control Control of movement Renovation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8 also revealed Kabelo’s exposure to digital artefacts as part of a digital world, and digital learning, based on his access and use of his mother’s mobile phone. Below is an example of coding video documentation that I applied on visits to various sites.
4.5.2 Coding video documentation

The video documentation that formed part of the visit to Kabelo’s Moletsane home, includes a moment in the life of Kabelo’s grandfather’s tavern.

Table 4.9. Coding video documentation: a moment in a home-based tavern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Processual &amp; Versus Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Figure 4.8. Screen shot from home visit video" /></td>
<td>K’s grandfather relaxes in a chair in the tavern area of his home. The area covers a room the size of the dining room but includes an outside area. He says he has been running the tavern for many years. He started it so that he could get some income. It gets busy at night, and on Saturdays, he says. At one point, a visitor interrupts us. He came to buy a beer. He left soon afterwards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tavern life in Kabelo’s home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tavern trading area in the home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home business for many years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Some income.” Visitor buying a beer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evidently, in my analytic memos, I applied versus coding, given my conversation with the research translator. These codes provided more nuance to my emerging understanding that Kabelo refers to home as more than one place and that life at his grandfather’s house, including tavern life and church life, were important spaces of interaction for him. These focused codes gave way to coding data where Kabelo’s voice and worldview are central. It includes his depiction of his morning routine before school, which he developed as a storyboard, which I show next.

4.5.4 Coding Kabelo’s storyboard

As explained in Chapter 3, I made use of aspects of digital storytelling as a research method, guided by Lambert, (2010) who provides a step-by-step guide, as well as Pink (2008), about tools for visual ethnography. Digital storytelling was first
utilised as a method to encourage Kabelo and the other three boys to use mobile phones that were given to them, to craft and tell stories about their daily lives. I hosted workshops with the boys and on one occasion made use of a skilled digital story-teller and videographer to facilitate the workshop. Digital storytelling served as an important mechanism for generating Kabelo’s voice and for enabling his contribution and participation in creating his ethnographic portrait.

Table 4.10 is an example of Kabelo’s storyboard of his morning routine before school. This storyboard was created by him as part of a workshop exercise, that was facilitated by the expert digital storyteller. She explained the concept of a storyboard in terms of sequenced activities, where each activity is captured in a frame. She used the example of her own morning routine and showed how each activity was captured in a frame and how they were sequenced. The facilitator asked the boys to take a few sheets of paper and draw one activity per sheet and to sequence them. When they were done, each of the boys explained their storyboard to the workshop participants. I took photograph of Kabelo’s storyboard of his morning routine and I took notes of how he reported his storyboard to the workshop. From these notes, I applied in vivo coding as well as my analytic memo. I pasted my in vivo codes of his words onto his storyboard and added them as in vivo codes beneath the picture of his storyboard, as shown in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10. Coding Kabelo’s storyboard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Vivo Codes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I wake up at 4 o clock”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"I have breakfast"
"I bathe"
"I eat"
"I watch TV"

**Analytic memo:** I am struck by the accuracy of Kabelo’s clock. It clearly showed an understanding of an ‘on-the-hour’ depiction of time on an analogue clock. I am also struck by his early rise when compared to my son who rises at 6 am and the children of my friend in Spain who rise at 8 am. His storyboard suggest that he leads his morning routine. Waking up early, eating breakfast, having a shower which in his storyboard he called having a bath, eating again and watching TV while he waits for his driver. I compared his version of his morning routine with his mother’s version. She indicated that he rises at 5 am instead. 5 am is still very early in the morning.

Another way in which Kabelo reflected the way he views himself is through his self-made photos and videos.

**4.5.5 Coding Kabelo’s selfies**

The numerous selfies taken by Kabelo is a salient feature of the mobile phone given to him to facilitate his digital story-telling. He returned the phone to me after a few weeks. Below is an example of the codes I allocated to my interpretation of one of Kabelo’s selfies.

*Table 4.11. Coding Kabelo’s selfies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Focused Processual Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| This is one of the first ‘selfies’ taken by Kabelo with the mobile phone that he was given. He strikes a pose with his face at an angle, gesturing an upside-down peace sign as a symbol of being cool and looking cool, whilst wearing his peak-cap. He tells me that this photo makes him look cool. In the background is the University of Johannesburg Robert Sobukwe building which for Kabelo is a symbol of his aspiration to “wanna come to UJ”. | Making selfie  
Self-making portrait of self  
Creating  
Making  
Looking cool  
Being cool  
Aspiring “wanna come to UJ” |

Coding Kabelo’s selfie differs from coding a photo that I had taken as part of documenting a site visit and participant observation. In this case, I was tapping into
that which he had made and created. Taking selfies is part of Kabelo’s play activity; it is part of that which he makes and the way he creates his self-portrait.

4.5.6 Summary

I have tried to provide an example of my use of *in vivo* coding, processual coding and versus coding where relevant, for a range of forms in which the data was captured. I have also tried to demonstrate how I compared my initial codes and how focused codes emerged in comparison with initial codes. Moreover, I have shown how I applied and coded my analytic memos and how I used these to compare with focused coding. I have also provided one illustration of how I integrated the literature during the coding process.

Table 4.12 provides a summary of the range of data forms and the way I coded the data.

*Table 4.12. An illustration of coding across range of data forms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example No</th>
<th>Data collection method</th>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Coding Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Classroom observation</td>
<td>First classroom observation: Introduction to Kabelo</td>
<td>Initial In Vivo coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Document reviews</td>
<td>Word clouds &amp; graph on Kabelo’s term report assessments</td>
<td>Use of Word-cloud in WordArt.com; initial processual coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>DBE policy on progression in Foundation Phase</td>
<td></td>
<td>Initial processual coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.4</td>
<td>Kabelo’s Learner Profile</td>
<td></td>
<td>Initial processual coding &amp; constant comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.5</td>
<td>Sesotho class test score</td>
<td></td>
<td>Initial processual coding, constant comparison &amp; analytic memo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.6</td>
<td>Interview with Kabelo</td>
<td>Kabelo introducing himself</td>
<td>Initial In Vivo coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.7</td>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td>Drive through Soweto</td>
<td>Initial In Vivo coding; processual coding and constant comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.8</td>
<td>Photo documentation</td>
<td>Home visit to Moletsane</td>
<td>Focused processual coding, constant comparison, analytic memo &amp; extant literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.9</td>
<td>Video documentation</td>
<td>A home-based tavern moment</td>
<td>Focused In Vivo, processual and versus coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.10</td>
<td>Digital story-telling</td>
<td>Kabelo’s storyboard</td>
<td>Focused In Vivo coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.11</td>
<td>Kabelo’s selfies</td>
<td>One of Kabelo’s first selfies taken with his mobile phone</td>
<td>Focused In Vivo and processual coding and constant comparison</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I show how the coding process evolved from initial coding, my use of constant comparisons; how I applied my analytic memos in an emergent, iterative way over time, as guided by Charmaz (2014). I also tried to explain how I made the jump from text to code as a process of inference and interpretation; and how I subjectively made a judgement through my choice of codes.

An important part of the constructivist model of grounded theory is the construction of concepts and theoretical propositions that emerge from the data via codes and the systematic clustering they lead to – a process that helped me not to paint an impressionist portrait, giving structure to my thinking about the ‘raw’ data. Here an important part of the process is the shift from codes to a higher level of abstraction and conceptualisation. These have been called ‘categories’ by Saldana (2016) and Charmaz (2014). Next, I explain how I made the shift from codes to categories.

4.6 From codes to categories

Together, my initial and focused codes amounted to 1251 codes generated from the selected data. I joined up similar codes and condensed them into 39 categories. Below I illustrate how I aggregated codes and converted them into categories. Figure 4.11 shows the location of this process on the data analysis map.
The process of comparing and clustering codes enabled categorisation. I went through each code that had been captured in an excel spreadsheet and linked each code to a category. Condensing and clustering the codes to fit into categories involves interpretation and inference. It also involves a shift towards the next level of abstraction.

I illustrate this process in the following two examples which demonstrate the move from data to codes to categories.
### Table 4.13: From codes to categories: a home visit example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Focused In Vivo &amp; Processual Codes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="" /> <strong>Figure 4.12. Playing with WordSearch</strong>&lt;br&gt;Kabelo was playing with WordSearch, an app on his mother’s mobile phone. Mother: This is good. It teaches him how to spell English words. Shafika: Do you like this app Kabelo? Kabelo: No, I don’t like it (shaking head). Shafika: Why are you playing with it then? Kabelo: My mummy wants me to play with it.</td>
<td>Playing WordSearch “teaches him how to spell.”&lt;br&gt;“I don’t like it”&lt;br&gt;“my mummy wants me to play with it”</td>
<td>19. Digital footprint&lt;br&gt;23. Digital learning&lt;br&gt;23. Digital learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analytic memo:</strong> Kabelo’s mother said that he downloaded the app, but it turns out that she did it for him and it seems she imposed it on him and he plays it reluctantly. When he demonstrated how he plays with it he showed how adept he was at completing all the exercises quickly and correctly.</td>
<td>Learning with mobile apps&lt;br&gt;Reluctantly playing on learning app</td>
<td>23. Digital learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="" /> <strong>Figure 4.13. House in Moletsane</strong>&lt;br&gt;Typical abode in Moletsane. The street where Kabelo’s grandfather stays, has two neat rows of 1950s-style township houses. They remind me of the style of houses in Langa and Hanover Park in Cape Town. The street is clean and quiet this Friday afternoon. Kabelo’s grandfather confirmed that they moved in their Moletsane home in the 1950s.</td>
<td>1950s-style township housing&lt;br&gt;Living in clean, quiet street</td>
<td>5. Soweto&lt;br&gt;7. Homes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Extant literature: (Findlay & Ogbu, 2011)

Townships served as urban reserves of black labour for burgeoning manufacturing industry. The sterile design of township-style houses was referred to as *matchbox houses*. It formed part of the design of townships as spaces of Apartheid control over the movement of people classified as black, across South Africa. Since then people have renovated and redesigned their homes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Focused In Vivo &amp; Processual Codes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Township housing are urban reserves of black labour&lt;br&gt;Sterile design&lt;br&gt;Spaces of control&lt;br&gt;Control of movement&lt;br&gt;Renovation</td>
<td>5. Soweto&lt;br&gt;7. Homes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I chose the same home visit example of coding photographs in Table 4.8 above, to show how I arrived at relevant categories. In this case, four categories emerged, namely “Digital footprint”, “Digital learning”, “Soweto” and “Homes” that were based on my interpretation of the focused codes.

I compared these with category development from codes on Kabelo’s selfies. They also stand in contrast with one another because I created the photographs in Figures 4.12 and 4.13 in Table 4.13. I demonstrate this in Table 4.14.

**Table 4.14: From codes to categories: Kabelo’s selfies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screenshot</th>
<th>Text from Notes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Figure 4.14: Kabelo’s selfie" /></td>
<td>This is one of the first ‘selfies’ taken by Kabelo with the mobile phone that he was given. He strikes a pose with his face at an angle, gesturing an upside-down peace sign as a symbol of being cool and looking cool, whilst wearing his peak-cap. He tells me that this photo makes him look cool. In the background is the University of Johannesburg Robert Sobukwe building which for Kabelo is a symbol of his aspiration to “wanna come to UJ”.</td>
<td>Selfie, Self-making portrait of self, Creating, Making, Looking cool, Being cool, Demonstrating aspiration</td>
<td>20. Making selfies, 4. I wanna come to UJ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.14 again shows how one category, “Making selfies” was derived from five codes: “Selfie”, “Self-making portrait of self”, “Creating”, “Making” and “Looking cool”. To illustrate the shift from data to categories, I employed the same Table 4.11 on coding Kabelo’s selfies to show how categories emerged in Table 4.14.

Moving to the next level of abstraction, involved the development of themes from the categories. I explain this process next.

**4.7 How ten themes emerged**

The development of themes from categories evolved as a dialectic back and forth movement of interpretation, drawing inferences and making meaning, interspersed and supported by my analytic memos. The process involved clustering the 38 categories into eight themes, as highlighted on the data analysis in Figure 4.15.
Here too, I was guided by the unit of analysis of the study, which is the world of play of underperforming boys, its research purpose which is to explore the playworld of underperforming boys and the main research question, which is, “Who is the township boy-child who is ostensibly under-performing academically?” Crucially too, I also consulted the literature to support theme formation.

I illustrate the journey from data to theme with two examples below.
Table 4.1: From categories to themes: Example of a home visit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Focused In Vivo &amp; Processual Codes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Figure 4.16: Playing with WordSearch" /></td>
<td>Kabelo was playing with <em>WordSearch</em>, an app on his mother’s mobile phone. Mother: This is good. It teaches him how to spell English words. Shafika: Do you like this app Kabelo? Kabelo: No, I don't like it (shaking head) Shafika: Why are you playing with it then? Kabelo: My mummy wants me to play with it.</td>
<td>Playing <em>WordSearch</em> “teaches him how to spell.” “I don't like it” “my mummy wants me to play with it”</td>
<td>Category 19: Digital footprint</td>
<td>Theme 5: Digital play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Figure 4.17. House in Moletsane" /></td>
<td>Typical abode in Moletsane. The street where Kabelo’s grandfather stays, has two neat rows of 1950s-style township houses. They remind me of the style of houses in Langa and Hanover Park in Cape Town. The street is clean and quiet this Friday afternoon. Kabelo’s grandfather confirmed that they moved in their Moletsane home in the 1950s.</td>
<td>1950s-style township housing Living in clean, quiet street</td>
<td>Category 5: Soweto</td>
<td>Theme 2: Soweto: Playground of playgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extant literature: (Findlay &amp; Ogbu, 2011)</td>
<td>Townships served as urban reserves of black labour for burgeoning manufacturing industry. The sterile design of township-style houses was referred to as <em>matchbox houses</em>. It formed part of the design of townships as spaces of Apartheid control over the movement of people classified as black, across South Africa. Since then people have renovated and redesigned their homes.</td>
<td>Township housing are urban reserves of black labour. Sterile design Spaces of control Control of movement Renovation</td>
<td>Category 5: Soweto</td>
<td>Theme 2: Soweto: Playground of playgrounds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.15 shows how every piece of data is linked to a code which is linked to a category and which in turn, is linked to a theme. In this way, the whole corpus of data is linked to themes. In this case, two key themes emerged: Digital play and Soweto: Playground of playgrounds. The latter is a reference to the vastness of Greater Soweto as one big playground in Kabelo’s world. This vast playground contains, for Kabelo, a range of different playgrounds such as Maponya Mall, his grandfather’s home with its community and his Dobsonville home.

Below is another illustration of the journey from data to themes, this time using Kabelo’s selfies as an example.

Table 4.16 From categories to themes: Kabelo’s selfies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screenshot</th>
<th>Text from Notes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Kabelo's selfie" /></td>
<td>This is one of the first ‘selfies’ taken by Kabelo with the mobile phone that he was given. He strikes a pose with his face at an angle, gesturing an upside-down peace sign as a symbol of being cool and looking cool, whilst wearing his peak-cap. He tells me that this photo makes him look cool. In the background is the University of Johannesburg Robert Sobukwe building which for Kabelo is a symbol of his aspiration to “wanna come to UJ”.</td>
<td>Selfie&lt;br&gt;Self-making portrait of self&lt;br&gt;Creating&lt;br&gt;Making&lt;br&gt;Looking cool&lt;br&gt;Being cool&lt;br&gt;Demonstrating aspiration</td>
<td>Category 20.&lt;br&gt;Making selfies&lt;br&gt;Category 4&lt;br&gt;I wanna</td>
<td>Theme 5: Digital play&lt;br&gt;Theme 1: Kabelo’s knowing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this case, two themes emerged: “Digital play” and “Kabelo’s knowing.” I also recognise, however, that making selfies as a category also relates to Theme 4: Play and Making. I explain these connections when writing Kabelo’s portrait in Chapter 5.

With the above two examples, I aim to demonstrate that the process of interpretation, inference and meaning-making has been systematic, iterative, interlinked and emergent. I have also demonstrated through the data analysis map that the outcome of this process has led to eight inter-related themes. My goal has been to show how the journey, from data to themes, was a journey from the
observable ‘raw’ data to higher levels of abstraction, which is the realm of theory-building. Theory-building is a cornerstone of grounded theory methodology in general and in constructivist grounded theory in particular. I explain how I have developed concepts and theoretical propositions that guided the writing of Kabelo’s critical ethnographic portrait. The latter is the substance of the next section.

4.8 Five overarching concepts

In grounded theory methodology, the substantive literature review is often delayed until the theory begins to emerge. As indicated earlier, though, I had initially consulted relevant literature, based on initial codes that are premised on the research purpose, question and unit of analysis. The literature related to the eight themes were continuously consulted as they began to emerge through the data analysis process.

Following on from the ten themes, are, what Saldana (2016) refers to as ‘through-lines’ in the interactions along the way between data, codes, categories and themes. The through-lines highlight five over-arching concepts that can be derived from the ten inter-related themes. These overarching concepts are: academic performance world, playworld, play capabilities, recognition and misrecognition. Kabelo’s academic performance world, whereas the other is Kabelo’s playworld. Kabelo’s playworld is filled with his various manifestations of play capabilities that manifest across a wide expanse of Greater Soweto as his vast playground. Various actors in Kabelo’s life recognise and acknowledge this world. However, it began to dawn on me that within his academic performance world, dominated by tests, assessments, measurement, struggles with reading and coping strategies, his play capabilities that are integral to his funds of knowledge in his playworld are misrecognised. I interpreted the notion of misrecognition of his play capabilities as a form of injustice experienced by Kabelo. I saw his playworld as the multi-dimensional reality, which highlights different dimensions of being. In addition to his academic performance world, I had begun to construct a view of the playful, making, knowing child, as if this world had become his quest for recognition. For me as an interpretive researcher the depiction of this young person had become both a scholarly and a social justice endeavour. The five salient concepts and theoretical propositions that emerge from the data analysis related to his play capabilities that are manifest in his
**playworld**, manifest as **misrecognition** in his **academic performance world** and need to manifest as socially-just **recognition**. These inter-related over-arching concepts are illuminated in the data analysis map in Figure 4.19.

![Data Analysis Map](Image)

**Figure 4.19. From themes to over-arching concepts on the data analysis map**

Through the write-up of what had become Kabelo’s critical ethnographic portrait and the related analyses that follow, I show how the main thesis statement of this study lives out in Kabelo’s daily life. The recognition of the playworld of underperforming boys, exemplified by Kabelo, as a social justice project is a thesis statement that is grounded in the data.

Chapter 2 of the study provided an analysis of theories of play, misrecognition and recognition as salient dimensions of theories of social justice. I present the contrasts and comparisons between Kabelo’s academic performance world, and his playworld as two interacting ‘activity systems’, as drawn from third-generation cultural-historical and activity theory (CHAT) as a thinking model (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). In this way, I locate Kabelo as a subject, his tools and signs he uses to mediate his knowledge, learning and sense-making in his performance and play worlds. I further include his interactions with peers and adults as a community
and within a given system of power relations as well as the formal and informal rules that form the parameters of each of the two activity systems.

Within these theoretical and conceptual frameworks, I show how I have composed Kabelo’s ethnographic portrait next.

4.9 Writing Kabelo’s critical ethnographic narrative portrait

The purpose of Kabelo’s critical ethnographic portrait was to portray, through rich and thick illustration, a narrative that I co-created with Kabelo. I drew on the In Vivo codes and data where his voice, images and words are prominent. I contrasted and compared Kabelo’s voice and views with those of his adults and peers.

I was guided by Geertz’s (1973) ‘thick description’ in providing rich textures to Kabelo’s portrait. Drawn from the work of Ryle (1968), Geertz proposes that thick descriptions are an interworked system of signs, that are semiotically mediated. In addition to the interworked system of signs, I added the tools and artefacts that mediate the human relations and object of Kabelo’s playworld and performance world.

Digital photographs produced by him and me, digital videos produced by him and me, vivid imagery conjured up in text and voice data through the talk of Kabelo and those with whom he relates, were woven through each of the eight themes and were represented within a Kabelo’s portrait as a narrative.

I employed narrative techniques in the write-up of Kabelo’s portrait along with the use of the narrative arc, which I explain next.

4.9.1 Narrative arc and themes

The narrative arc is a story-telling technique that refers to the path or plot that a story follows. It is also called a ‘story arc’ or ‘dramatic arc’. I employed the five-act structure of classical drama and invoked German novelist, Gustav Freytag. He identified a beginning or exposition; a rising action; a climax; a falling action and a resolution (Freytag, 1863) employed by dramatists such as Shakespeare, Schiller and Goethe (Quickbase, 2019). The narrative arc is graphically depicted in Figure 4.19. I employed the narrative arc as a story-telling drama (or dramatic arc) and named each of the eight themes as dramatic acts.
Below I map the ten themes in Kabelo’s portrait against the narrative arc, as shown in Figure 4.20.

Along with my own wording of the ten themes, I included Kabelo’s words in his voice, which were also the in vivo codes, as a summarising title for each of the ten themes. Each theme in Kabelo’s words matched a corresponding theme, based on my own terminology, used to capture the theme. For example, I entitled the first theme: I know the way. These are Kabelo’s words. I attached to this, my own wording, to capture the theme. Here I called it: Kabelo’s knowing. In this way, each of
the eight themes in Kabelo’s words or in the words of one of the adults, was also allocated an overarching thematic phrase that I implemented to capture my interpretation of the meaning of the theme.

Moreover, in implementing the narrative arc as representation, I referred to each of the ten themes as *ten acts in a drama that make up Kabelo’s portrait*. Each of the ten themes corresponded with a dramatic act. I illustrate this in Table 4.17 which provides a matrix of each of the dramatic acts, the data sources from which they emerged and the narrative techniques that I employed.

*Table 4.17 Data Sources and Narrative Techniques*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme No</th>
<th>Dramatic Acts</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Narrative Techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kabelo’s knowing <em>I know the way</em></td>
<td>Participant conversation and observation during a car drive</td>
<td>Exposition: Introducing the protagonist in the context of the cultural milieu that characterises Soweto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participant observation in the home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Video tour of home and surrounds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Soweto as vast playground <em>I am a Soweto boy</em></td>
<td>Review of documents on Soweto</td>
<td>Scene-setting: Meeting three main adult characters and secondary characters across different Soweto settings. Learning about township context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnographic interviews with Kabelo’s mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interview with Kabelo’s father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kabelo-created videos and photos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Joy at school <em>I love my teacher</em></td>
<td>Review of documents on Joy of Learning School</td>
<td>Rising action: Learning about school context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnographic interviews with Kabelo and teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pretend-play <em>I play school</em></td>
<td>Digital story telling focus group discussion</td>
<td>Climax: Scenes from the school setting and meeting another child character – one whom Kabelo fears: an antagonist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interview with teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participant observation during school visits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Play and making <em>Mummy let’s make that</em></td>
<td>Focus group discussion with two boys</td>
<td>Climax: Different ways of play and making across contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group discussion with four mothers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Home visits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School visit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Digital play <em>I love selfies</em></td>
<td>Focus group discussion with four mothers</td>
<td>Climax: The digital presence in Kabelo’s world of play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parent Survey on digital footprint</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Digital storytelling workshops</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Home visits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kabelo-constructed videos &amp; photos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Violent play <em>Boys must not beat girls</em></td>
<td>Focus group discussion with two boys</td>
<td>Climax: Kabelo’s reflections on his exposure to domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Digital storytelling workshop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme No</td>
<td>Dramatic Acts</td>
<td>Data Sources</td>
<td>Narrative Techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Play and caring</td>
<td>Focus group discussion with two boys, Digital storytelling workshop, Participant observation</td>
<td>Climax: Kabelo’s reflections on challenging domestic violence and self-care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A gentleman tucks in his shirt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Cognitive deficits</td>
<td>Document reviews, Interviews with teacher and psychologist, Ethnographic interview with Kabelo’s a friend, Focus group discussion with two boys, Interview with teacher, Classroom observation, Home visit</td>
<td>Denouement: Scenes related to reading challenges the protagonist’s view on his reading challenges juxtaposed with the voices of adult characters about his cognitive challenges. Kabelo’s evacuation from his school to move to a new school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Recognition &amp; resolution</td>
<td>Document reviews, Focus group discussion with two boys, Ethnographic interview with Kabelo’s mother, Ethnographic interview with Kabelo</td>
<td>Resolution: Kabelo’s voice in his new school and how much he loves the school, his new teacher, his new friends and principal. Meeting the antagonists about the protagonist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I love my new school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The eight themes of Kabelo’s portrait provide insight into a slice of Kabelo’s life as a playworld, in a slice of time.

Along with the narrative plot or fabula, is the way of telling the story (Bruner, 1991b), or, in this case, composing the narrative portrait. The way Kabelo’s story is told, is through the use, as far as possible, of his voice and his words. For example, instead of me introducing Kabelo to the reader as the researcher, I used Kabelo’s words to introduce himself to a reading audience. Also, I used Kabelo’s own words when he presented the guided tour of his home from his self-made video. These words were: *Dis is a kishen. Dis is my mudder fridge. Dis is my mudder stove.* I used the phonetic spelling of the English words that he used, in an attempt to project his voice and his words authentically, as a storytelling technique. Next, I present the use of data displays in Kabelo’s portrait.
4.9.2 Data displays

I draw on Miles, Huberman, and Saldana’s (2020) reference to data displays as well as the original work of Miles and Huberman (1994). The authors suggest that data displays are an “organised, condensed assembly of information” that enables analysis and reflection (2020, p9). For them, data displays include graphics, networks, and matrices. I have added graphics, tables and illustrations as tools for reflection or to illuminate important points raised in the text. To their range of data displays, I add photographs, storyboards and screenshots of video recordings, as part of a collage within the portrait-making process. I provide two examples of data displays that I used in Figure 4.22 and Figure 4.23.

![Satellite View of Moletsane Route](image)

Figure 4.22 Example of data display: a satellite view of the route to Moletsane

The data display providing a satellite map of the route to Moletsane served to reinforce the theme related to Kabelo knowing the way from his school to his grandfather’s place. The second data display example shows a map of Greater Soweto, which serves as Kabelo’s vast playground, which comprises different playgrounds that define Kabelo’s playworld.

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21 According to the Kindle version, the citation needs to state 2020 as the year of publication
The data display shows the extensive nature of the township and the variety and diversity of spaces and flows of ‘Kabelo’s Soweto’.

In addition to the data displays, as part of conclusion-drawing (Miles et al., 2020), I also show how I tried to show veracity in assembling data to compose Kabelo’s portrait. In the same way that condensation and data displays are part of the analysis process, Miles et al. (2020, p9) also highlight that verifying qualitative data is a crucial part of the analysis process. The data, with their interpretation, have to be tested for their plausibility, sturdiness, ‘member checking’ and confirmability, which in an interpretive, qualitative study serve as criteria to validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985b).

Throughout the data collection process, I would check with Kabelo, his mother, his teacher and child psychologist whether I understood what they meant. I sent interview transcripts for verification to Kabelo’s teacher and child psychologist. I also went through the entire written portrait, step by step, with Kabelo and his mother to ensure that I have captured his portrayal of his playworld with integrity and accuracy. During this process, they elaborated more on the gambling prevalence in the township, including among children. They confirmed that the gambling game that is played at Kabelo’s school is called zwebi.
In this way, I have demonstrated, at a minimum, the processes that I have adopted, and argue that these can serve as endorsement of validity in the write up of Kabelo’s portrait in Chapter 5.

4.10 Summary

This chapter has mapped, in some detail, the data analysis journey from the data collection, data capturing to the write up of Kabelo’s portrait. I explained how the data collection and analysis was an iterative, emergent process based on constant comparison and progression towards higher levels of abstraction. These are defining features of data analysis in constructivist grounded theory methodology as propounded by Charmaz (2014).
Recognising Kabelo’s Play Capabilities
A Critical Ethnographic Narrative Portrait

CHAPTER 5
I am Kabelo¹
My name means unity.
I am nine years old.
I will be ten in February.
I go to [Joy of Learning] Primary School.
I love my school.
I love soccer.
I play with my friends.
I have a girlfriend.
I also play netball.
I love kwotas². It is so nice.
I also like Steers burgers but
I like kwotas more.
I wanna be an engineer, and
I wanna be a truck driver.
When you visit, come on Friday to my home in Moletsane.

¹ Kabelo is a pseudonym
² Kwotas are like “bunny chows” which is a quarter loaf of white bread, with the middle taken out and replaced with curry. Instead of curry, kwotas contain lots of polony, fried egg, atchar, and chips. An outbreak of listeriosis announced in March 2018, meant that Kabelo could no longer eat his favourite meal.
Introduction

This was how an initially shy Kabelo introduced himself to me as the researcher and to Koketso, the research translator, during interviews in September and October 2017. We were seeking his permission to participate in this research project, to visit him at home and seek his guidance on the best times to visit.

In this chapter, Kabelo takes the adult academic community on a journey through Soweto, his vast playground. Here he moves, makes, thinks, knows and makes sense of his world through play.

I was first introduced to Kabelo by his teacher while visiting their Grade 2 classroom at a school in Soweto in August 2017. He looked at me shyly as she spoke to him in Sesotho, explaining that I was going to spend some time with him. He shook my hand and smiled demurely.

As the protagonist in this narrative, Kabelo’s voice is the most dominant amidst the voices of six characters: his friend at school; his mother and father; the education system managers which include his teacher and educational psychologist; and the researcher and research translator. Kabelo’s play capabilities are portrayed across ten intersecting thematic acts, as shown in the data display 5.1.
The exposition and scene-setting action in this narrative include the first three dramatic acts. They provide insight on Kabelo’s view of Soweto, his vast playground; his homes and school life.

**Act 1: Kabelo’s knowing: I know the way:**

In setting the scene, Kabelo takes charge of guiding me through the bustling streets of Soweto.

**Act 2: Soweto as a vast playground: I’m a Soweto boy:**

Next, he presents his Soweto as a lively playground, during the ‘slice of time’ that I engaged with him in the field. Like his parents and grandparents, Kabelo moves in and across a range of places across Greater Soweto, highlighting different aspects of his complex world of play filled with different playgrounds.

**Act 3: Joy at school: I love my teacher:**

We are shown brief glimpses of his life at school, which instils joy and pride.

**Act 4: Pretend-play: I play school:**

Two scenes of Kabelo’s pretend-play shows how he plays school at home, mimicking his school life. His pretend-play also involves beating a police officer.

**Act 5: Game-play and making: Mummy let’s make that:**

Kabelo shows us how his spontaneous game-play, making and working demonstrate different play capabilities.
Act 6: Digital play: *I love selfies*:

Kabelo invites us into his digital world, his digital play. He guides us through his selfies, his self-made videos, how he communicates with his cell phone and tablet, his digital game-play and digital learning.

Act 7: Violent play: *She hit my teacher*:

Kabelo’s play-world is also characterised by his exposure to violence in his home, school and community.

Act 8: Play and care: *A gentleman wears socks with tekkies*:

Kabelo tells of his self-care and care for others. He provides insights on violence as a social problem and ways to address endemic violence.

The denouement of Kabelo’s narrative relates to his world of academic performance.

Act 9: Cognitive deficits: *I struggle with reading*:

Kabelo provides his perspective on his world of academic performance. He acknowledges his struggles with reading and his experience with underperformance. His voice compares with the views of his teacher, his mother, his friends, and the school psychologist.

Act 10: Recognition and resolution: *I love my new school*:

Finally, Kabelo talks about feeling seen at his new school which he has grown to love.

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3 Tekkies refer to athletic sport shoes or sneakers.  
Data Display 5.3: On the playground
I know the way to my grandfather’s place,” said the then-nine-year-old Kabelo confidently as he stepped inside my car, one Friday afternoon in October 2017.

I was fumbling with my geo-positioning system (GPS) trying to plot a route from Pimville to Moletsane in Soweto. “That’s wonderful because I am so bad with directions. This is why I use this GPS,” said I, acutely conscious of how spatially-challenged I can get, especially when navigating routes and places I have not travelled before.

He was asking me to trust him, I thought and yet I still felt the need to be guided with computational accuracy. I quickly punched in his grandfather’s address on my GPS and verified the route by also plotting the coordinates on the Google Maps app on my iPhone 6S - just to be sure I get there. I realised that by doing this, I was trusting him less and trusting my never-lets-me down computerised systems more.

As I drove out of the school gate, that sunny Friday afternoon, amidst the bustling traffic, hooting taxi’s, interspersed with the oft-invisible, anonymous amabhokareza⁴ (waste-picker), marching stochastically past the school with their large waste-filled trolleys, Kabelo exclaimed: “At the robot, you turn left”.

Kabelo was armed with a camera and taking pictures of himself and the route along the way, as he spoke to Koketso, the research translator. He then pronounced as if a tourist guide: “See, there is Maponya Mall”.

⁴ Amabhokareza are the estimated 90 000 people in SA referred to as waste-pickers who make a living by trawling through waste-dumps to look for things to sell or recycle. Many can be seen in Zola and Pimville, Soweto. Waste-pickers divert 16-24 tonnes of recyclable waste from landfills per picker per annum in SA, and between 76% and 97% of waste-pickers worldwide say they suffer from social exclusion due to the nature of their work (Godfrey & Oelofse, 2017; Samson, 2017).

Left: Data display 5.4: Kabelo taking photos of the route.
As I parked the car, Kabelo jumped out and led us into the house. The road, with its neat rows of houses on either side, was narrow and quiet that Friday afternoon, with the odd pedestrian walking past.

The front door was ajar when we arrived as if we were expected. As we entered the neatly-furnished lounge and dining room area, Sesotho-speaking voices on Jozi FM® were audible from the radio. The walls had a picture of Bloubergstrand with a full view of Table Mountain in the distance. The cabinet against the wall, displayed photos of Kabelo and his cousin whom he called his brother.

On the opposite wall rested a picture of a matured couple whom I suspected was Kabelo’s maternal grandfather and grandmother.

When Kabelo ran to call his grandmother and his mother, his grandfather arrived with his mother’s car, a newly-bought 2006 blue Toyota Yaris, a few minutes after us.

While he spoke about the shopping mall, I noticed the conspicuous bright red Virgin Active sign which declared: “Hola Soweto” (Hello Soweto). This Virgin Active branch, a famously-branded gym franchise in South Africa and the UK, offered babysitting services, according to the billboard.

“At the next robot, you turn left”, directed self-assured Sesotho-speaking Kabelo, a minute before the computer-generated English-accented-female voice beckoned: “in one hundred meters, turn left”. Kabelo continued: “At the garage, turn left and then you turn right and then you are at my grandfather’s house.

My grandfather’s house is a tavern. But, he does not drink. He is a pastor. We are going to church on Sunday to celebrate him.” As we drove past the BP garage, he saw his grandfather’s car. “There is my grandfather” he shouted excitedly. We decided not to stop at the garage but to continue on our onward journey along clean well-paved roads, towards his grandfather’s house.

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5 Jozi FM - a local community radio station that was started in 1995 and was one of the largest community radio stations in South Africa

Data Display 5.5: A satellite view of the route to Moletsane
A tall elderly gentleman entered the house and introduced himself as Kabelo’s grandfather. I told him how amazed I was at Kabelo’s directions to his home. He replied: “When Kabelo was four years old, he directed me from my home in Moletsane to Dobsonville. He just knows the way”.

This act sets the scene within which Kabelo introduces himself and his world to an adult audience, particularly academia, represented by myself as the researcher and the research translator. He invites the adults into his world as he plays the role of a tour guide. The child was asking to be trusted. He wants his knowledge to be trusted, and he provides evidence that his knowledge could be trusted. He appeals for trust in his leadership, his voice, his agency, a trust to which the adults eventually yielded.

During this drive through Soweto, in the confines of my car, Kabelo knew more than the adults and the machine represented by the GPS. He was in charge. He clearly led the way.
Soweto as a vast playground
I’m a Soweto boy

“Akanamali kodwa uthanda yonke, yonke into engiyiyo” [He doesn’t have money, but she loves everything I am].

“I love this song”, said Kabelo as he sang along joyously to the award-winning hit Akanamali by Samthing Soweto and Sun El. The song was playing on my car radio on our way to Moletsane on a Saturday afternoon in November 2017.

As we sang, he said lyrically:
“Ehhh, I am in a Soweto boy”.

Akanamali has a catchy tune. It is about a boy who does not have money. His friend reminds him about his moneyless status and warns that he loves a money-and-material-loving girl. He cannot afford to be her boyfriend. I knew it well and sang along happily, wondering whether it symbolised Kabelo’s perception of me as the materially better-privileged girl in the nice car.

Act 2 Scene 1: Soweto: Kabelo’s heritage

“Kabelo was born in Parktown, but I was born in Bara”, says Kabelo’s mother in an interview at their Dobsonville home.

Kabelo’s membership of Soweto’s so-called ‘born-free’ generation (Azania, 2014), is evident by the fact that he was born in 2008 at Parklane Clinic in Parktown Johannesburg, a private hospital established in 1996 in a former Apartheid-classified white suburb. His birth occurred 14 years into South Africa’s post-Apartheid democracy. His forty-three-year-old mother, however, was born at Baragwanath Hospital, a public hospital in Soweto while his forty-six-year-old father who was born at his mother’s home in Mapetla.

Left: Data display 5.7: Map of Soweto
Image by: South African History Online
She continues: “I grew up in Moletsane and attended Moletsane High School where I finished my matric.”

Kabelo’s father says in a separate interview:

“I was at Morris Isaacson. The one that make June 16 ...My sister, the first born, she was with the group with Tsietsie Mashinini. I went to form four, err, like Grade 11. After that, I went to technical college. I end up with Grade 2.

The sister that Kabelo’s father is referring to, currently serves as a high-ranking executive in a leading airline company in South Africa. She is the aunt that Kabelo refers to when he says: “My aunty work at the airport”.

Kabelo’s maternal, and paternal grandparents also lived in Soweto for many years and continue to do so at present.

“We were one of the first houses in Soweto. We moved here in Moletsane in the 1950s”, explains his grandfather during my visit to his home in October 2019. Moletsane, along with neighbouring Tladi, Mapetla, Phiri, and Naledi were established as the first settlements in Soweto in the 1950s.

These settlements were reserved for Tswana and Sotho-speaking people, classified as Black Africans (Bonner & Segal, 1998). In 2011 Moletsane reportedly had 14,824 residents of whom 99.6 per cent were classified Black African and 4.5 per cent spoke Sesotho while 24 per cent spoke Setswana (Statistics South Africa, 2012b).

“My parents came to Soweto from Kroonstad in Free State, in 1948.” Says Kabelo’s father. Since then they resided in Mapetla.

In 2011, Mapetla had a population of 23,146 and 7,534 households. Of its population, 38 per cent spoke Sesotho, and 26.1 per cent spoke Isizulu as their home languages (Statistics South Africa, 2012a).

My mother speaks sSwati, says his Sesotho-speaking father. “I also speaks sSwati, but not fluently, and I mix it with iZulu”.

“Sometimes Kabelo speaks to me in Zulu – he says uyazi ukuthi (you know that) and we don’t speak Zulu”, says his mother in a focus group discussion in November 2017. “My mother speaks Setswana,” she says further. Of the 11 official African languages in South Africa, Kabelo mainly speaks Sesotho. However, he also speaks and understands Isizulu and understands Setswana and sSwati.

Kabelo’s father works at a large retail store, in a neighbouring mining town. He had been working there as a salesman since 1997. Before this, he sold sweets from a home-based shop, called a spaza shop in Mapetla.

Kabelo’s mother has been unemployed for three years. She had given up her ‘well-paid’ (R18,000 per month) job at Nedbank as an admin clerk to take care of Kabelo when he became ill in 2015. She has not worked since then. At the time of my fieldwork, their gross monthly household income was between R8,000 to R10,000 per month.

“Kabelo is my only grandson and Kabelo’s mother is my only child” says his maternal grandfather. His wife’s sister also has a son who is two years older than Kabelo, who stays with them. Kabelo refers to him as a brother and sometimes as a cousin.

8 A spaza shop is an informal retail shop usually run from home (Ligthem, 2005)


**Act 2, Scene 2: Different Soweto homes**

When asked during our first interview, where he stayed, Kabelo says emphatically: “I stay in Dobsonville!” His Learner Profile states that he stays in Moletsane, and when his mother filled in a research survey for this study, she stated that they stay in Moletsane. I learned then that Kabelo has more than one home which also includes his half-sister’s home in Molapo where he also stays from time to time. In late March 2018, they moved to another home from Dobsonville to Mapetla.

**I love the garage in my house in Dobsonville**

Kabelo provides a guided tour on his self-produced video about his Dobsonville home which his parents rented from his father’s sister at the time. I was struck by Kabelo’s access to a host of electronic resources including his own bedroom with his own TV. Not visible in his video, is a separate furnished outhouse with a bedroom and living area with another TV towards the back of the house. This outhouse was empty during my visits. “We have guests who stay there when they visit”, says his mother.

Kabelo’s home was situated in Old Dobsonville which had a population of 40,328 in 2011 with 11,852 households. Then, the majority of the people spoke Setswana as a home language (38.2 per cent) followed by 22.1 per cent who spoke Isizulu as a home language (Statistics SA, 2012). On one of my afternoon visits to his Dobsonville home, after parking my car in the street, Kabelo appeared from behind the outside garage door to let me into their home.

I followed him through the short passage into the small lounge area where his mother was sitting on a chair while the TV was playing from a cabinet, displaying various family photographs. Kabelo left the lounge area and a few minutes later, emerged from the kitchen with a rinsed glass and saucer and then left again only to appear with a bottle of Coke which he gave to me to pour myself a drink. I was reminded of my childhood when my mother advised me always to offer visitors a drink and to make sure that they were given a glass and a saucer as a sign of respect.

“Dis is a kishen. Dis is my mudder fridge. Dis is my mudder stove. Dis is daanroom (referring to dining room). Dis is my mudder TV. Dis is my mudder and my fadder sleeping. Dis is a bedroom. I sleep alone. I’m not scary when I sleep alone.”
Kabelo returned to his spot on the couch where he was sitting and continued to work earnestly and patiently through his DBE Grade 3 Mathematics workbook while the TV displayed the then-Finance Minister delivering his 2018 Budget Speech. His mother sat motionless on a chair, observing him from time to time.

He popped up his head and says “I don’t like Jacob Zuma, but I like Cyril Ramaphosa”. Kabelo’s comment about South Africa’s president-elect reflects an awareness of the political leadership of the country. I wondered whether this was because the president-elect at the time, had lived in Soweto. The history of big ‘struggle’10 men and women from Soweto seem to be embedded in Kabelo’s cultural DNA. “I love Winnie Mandela. She is our mother”, he declared, when news of her death broke on 2 April 2018. He watched and recorded the funeral of “Mama Winnie” and said; “she died for us.”

I noticed that every time I visited the Dobsonville home, Kabelo and his mother would be the only ones at home. He was not playing with friends, even though he often talked about friends at his Dobsonville home. She says on one of my visits.

“Kabelo mostly plays by himself inside the house because it is not very safe for him to play in the street. You know they broke into my house a few times here in Dobsonville and stole stuff. So it is not safe here.”

10 The struggle is a reference to the struggle for liberation especially since 1948 when Apartheid was officially legislated in SA but also before. Big struggle men and women is a reference to popular leaders of the resistance against Apartheid who were members of the African National Congress and Pan Africanist Congress (SA History Online, 2018)
I go to my grandfather on Fridays

Kabelo spends his weekends in Moletsane, at his grandfather’s house. He sleeps in a back room that also contains a large double bed, a cupboard, and a TV. The house has a covered yard area which serves as the tavern area, where at the time of my visits, his grandfather and grandmother would sit and talk.

The street where Kabelo’s grandfather stays has two neat rows of 1950s-style township houses. They remind me of the style of homes in Langa and Hanover Park in Cape Town. The street is clean and quiet when I visit on Friday afternoons.

On the weekends when I visited, there would be two to three men around the house sometimes enjoying a drink outside.

Kabelo’s grandfather was relaxing in a chair in the tavern area of his home on one of my visits. The area covers a room the size of the dining room but includes an outside area. He says he has been running the tavern for many years. He started it so that he could get some income. It gets busy at night, and on Saturdays, he says.

At one point, a visitor interrupts us. He came to buy a beer. He left soon afterwards.

When talking to Koketso I referred to the grandfather’s business as a shebeen. He tells me that people call them taverns not shebeens in Soweto. Perhaps then shebeens is a derogatory term that has reference to illegal liquor trade under Apartheid and taverns refer to legitimate licensed liquor trade in homes.
I have a new home in Mapetla

“Dis is my new house”, said Kabelo excitedly when we arrived from one of our focus group discussions. As he stepped out of my car, he greeted the group of teenagers standing around a car opposite their home. They all chorused a greeting in return and called his name, in recognition. Next to their house was a hairdressing salon. When Kabelo’s paternal grandmother died in 2017, his father, as the only male among her four children, inherited her house in Mapetla. They moved into this house in late March 2018.

I noticed that their house was more spacious than their Dobsonville home, and this time includes an enclosed garage. Kabelo showed me around the house. “Here is my new bedroom.” The bedroom sported a double bed, covered neatly with a duvet.

“Here is my mudder and fadder’s bedroom”. His parents’ bedroom was neatly furnished and had a photo of his paternal grandmother hanging above their bed. He showed me their larger kitchen with a microwave, washing machine, fridge, stove as he took out a bottle of Sprite in the fridge. He then joined his parents in their larger lounge and dining room area with his tablet in his hand.

They were watching a programme on Msanzi TV while his mother was eating a meal. He came to sit next to me, switched on his tablet and clicked on a game icon. He was playing another car-game that he had downloaded. “My fadder bought me this tablet”, he said proudly. Kabelo showed me how he raced another car in one of his favourite games.

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11 Msanzi is an urban slang reference to South Africa as a country and Msanzi TV refers to a range of local TV channels available on satellite television.

Right: Data Display 5.10: Kabelo’s Mapetla home
Act 2 Scene 3: Cemetery and Church

"When my granny died, I visit the graveyard. I was very sad and my fadder was sad."

Kabelo was referring to the funeral of his paternal grandmother who passed away in 2017. I accompanied him and his mother on a visit to the vast expanse that characterises Avalon Cemetery in Chiawelo, to bury his friend’s grandmother one Saturday afternoon. This visit revealed that his mother’s uncles, aunts, and grandparents are buried there along with many anti-Apartheid struggle icons. “People get born here, and they die here in Soweto. And at this cemetery your ANC people are also buried like Joe Slovo, Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi and Hector Pietersen”, said his mother, while we were driving to the graveside for the burial ceremony.

While attending the funeral service, Kabelo chorused passionately to all the hymns and gospel songs, with the accompanying dance moves.

Being born and buried in the same township is another symbol of being local, being kasi\(^\text{12}\), being Sowetan. Avalon Cemetery was established in 1972. It was one of the largest in South Africa, historically reserved for black people, with an estimated 374 000 people buried there in 2017 (Mosolodi, 2017). During the period of my fieldwork, Kabelo’s mother attended two funerals on a Saturday as had the mothers and fathers of the other three boys in the study. It seems that many Saturdays are spent attending funerals or tombstone unveiling ceremonies at Avalon Cemetery.

My grandfather’s church

“I go to church with my grandfadder on Sunday. I pray and sing and listen to my grandfadder talking”, says Kabelo during one of our drives to his Dobsonville home in December 2017.

Kabelo’s maternal grandfather is a pastor at The Good Shepherd Anglican Church in Tladi, a neighbouring extension to Moletsane. Kabelo said that he visits the church every Sunday morning. His digital videos contain clips of a sermonising pastor, his grandfather’s inauguration as a pastor, women preachers and scenes of hymn singing and praying. The sermons are delivered in Sesotho as are the hymns that are sung.

\(^{12}\text{Kasi is a colloquial reference to the township, derived from the Afrikaans word lokasie which refers to location. Under Apartheid the kasi or township were restricted areas reserved for black people.}\)

Left: Data Display 5.11: Celebrating Kabelo’s grandfa- ther as pastor.
Act 2 Scene 4: I like to swim in Pimville

“I love to swim in Pimville when it is hot. In holidays I go to the swimming pool.”

During the December holidays in 2017, he visited the Pimville municipal pool a few times. His self-made video and photos include scenes of him playing in the pool with friends and posing for the video camera in the pool. Pimville municipal swimming pool is one of 58 publicly-owned olympic-size swimming pools owned by the City of Johannesburg. It is also one of seven heated swimming pools in the City (City of Joburg, 2018).

Act 2 Scene 6: I go to movies at Maponya Mall

Kabelo spends many Saturdays with his mother visiting Maponya Mall.

My mudder buy me tekkies\textsuperscript{13} and socks at Maponya Mall. You must not wear tekkies without socks. Sometimes my mudder buy me Steers burgers at Maponya.

“I go to movies at Maponya Mall with my mudder. My favourite movies is Fast and Furious. I also watch on TV Fast and Furious 8, Fast and Furious 7, Fast and Furious 6.”

Maponya Mall is another playground for Kabelo, where he enjoys fast food and when possible, purchasing consumer products. It is named after one of South Africa’s most renowned black businessman, Richard Maponya. Maponya Mall was the first shopping centre in Soweto; the first black-owned in the country and in 2018, still ranked among the largest malls in SA with 200 stores and a cinema complex (Gauteng Department of Tourism, 2018).

Through my scholarly lens, Maponya Mall is associated with Posel’s (2010) reference to the statutory de-racialization of economic activity since the fall of Apartheid. Consequently, shopping malls and businesses were established by a burgeoning black elite. The mall and the Virgin Active gym were symbols of social mobility, popular culture and often, conspicuous consumption, a shadow feature alongside the liberation struggle with which Soweto is strongly associated (Posel, ibid).

This burgeoning black elite resides side by side with a spectrum of socio-economic conditions of varying degrees of wealth and poverty. At the other end of this spectrum are those associated with the human waste consequences of consumption, depicted in the lives of the waste-picker (Samson, 2017), in the vast expanse of Soweto.

\textsuperscript{13} Takkies are a colloquialism for sneakers

Right top: Data Display 5.12: Swimming at the Pimville Municipal pool
I became aware of how the stark inequalities in South Africa assumed more complex nuances in urban township life, rendering lame prevailing references to Soweto as only being a place of black, poor and marginalised people. I was also mindful of my own class status as a resident of Fourways, 36 kilometres North of Soweto, an upmarket municipality which boasts ten shopping malls, ten upmarket gyms within a 10km radius.

**Act 2 Scene 7: I came with taxi**

One Saturday morning I arrived early for our workshop at the Centre for Education Practice Research (CEPR) based at the University of Johannesburg Soweto campus in Pimville. I found Kabelo alone waiting at the entrance.

"Shafika: Wow, you are early. Where’s your mom?
Kabelo: I came alone.
Shafika: By yourself?
Kabelo: Yes
Shafika: By taxi?
Kabelo: Yes
Shafika: Have you travelled on your own before?
Kabelo: Yes"

Kabelo has been travelling with his mother to our Saturday workshops. Even though she has a car, she still travels by taxi with him. She also confirmed that Kabelo sometimes goes by himself to a different part of Soweto by taxi. She believes that he knows how to travel by himself and can take care of himself.

He also travels to and from school with a driver whom his parents know well. The driver, also named Kabelo, would always be on time, according to his mother. Kabelo says that he plays the radio, listens to the news and music while driving to and from school. Kabelo is fond of the driver who also likes to talk to him who likes to talk to him.

The scenes in Act 2, provide a rich tapestry that makes up Kabelo’s Soweto. It shows that much of Kabelo’s life, since birth, is reproduced, consumed and lived locally across the vast expanse of Greater Soweto which for Kabelo, serves as a vast playground.

Soweto remains one of South Africa’s largest and oldest black townships, spanning 200 square kilometres. In 2011, Statistics South Africa (2012c) recorded a population of 1.27 million and 355, 331 households, 98.5 per cent of whom were classified as Black African with 37.1 per cent who spoke Isizulu as a home language and 15.5 per cent who spoke Sesotho as a home language.

Kabelo’s movement across different homes, places of leisure, his cultural and political DNA was apparent in his awareness of South African politics and his views on political leaders. His English and Sesotho talk and his interpretation of his surroundings through the videos and photographs he produced, provide further evidence of the social and cultural repertoires of his playworld in Soweto. He was exposed to different African languages across this vast playground. Southern Sotho was most-spoken at all of his homes, in church and could be heard on the community radio that constantly played in the background at his grandfather’s house. Church life existed side by side with home- based businesses – the hairdresser next door in Mapetla; his grandfather’s tavern in Moletsane and the exposure that children like Kabelo has to adult lives.

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14 Whilst this thesis draws on Apartheid racial classification categories with operational intent as reflected in the categories provided by Statistics South Africa, it supports the view that race is a social construct and it is not an accurate representation of human biological variation.
I love my school and I love my teacher and I like Sesotho and Maths at school”, says Kabelo in one of his interviews. He often talks about how much he loves his school and his classmates and the fact that he can play soccer, watch girls play netball and that they go on outings and camps.

I accompanied him on their Grade 2 field trip to the Johannesburg Zoo in September 2017, when he was still shy and reluctant to talk and preferred to walk with his friends. “Can giraffes bite”, he asked me on one occasion when he seemed to have plucked up the courage to talk to me.

On my first visit to the school, I compared it to many schools I had visited in townships across South Africa, and I thought it had excellent infrastructure with spacious well-resourced classrooms with a teacher: student ratio of 1:35 in Kabelo’s Grade 2 class. Kabelo’s teacher was qualified with BA Foundation Phase Honours, and was pursuing her Masters in Childhood Education at the time.

She had three years’ experience as a Foundation Phase Grade 2 teacher which she spent at Joyful Learning Primary. She specialised in learning in Sesotho. The home language in which she taught, was Sesotho, and five children I spoke to during different break times on my visits to the school, would all say that they loved her.
Act 3 Scene 1: Storyboard on life at school

Below is a storyboard that Kabelo prepared on his own at his Dobsonville home about his life at school. It includes Kabelo’s talk as he explained the storyboard to me.

On all of the occasions I visited, the Grade 2 Sesotho classroom would be a controlled and quiet learning space with the teacher’s voice audibly giving instructions and some students would sit with their hand raised obediently, waiting patiently to answer questions. One student would be allowed to speak at a time. The room is neatly organised in sections. A reading corner is clearly demarcated, displaying various readers, and all the walls are organised and decorated with posters and words.

There is an English word wall and a Sesotho word wall. The teacher’s desk clearly identifiable in one corner of the spacious classroom. During three days of the week, towards the back of the class, a group of young university student-teachers would visit to observe the lesson and sometimes participate in providing teaching assistance.

Kabelo often sits quietly at his desk, writing in his notebook. His reference to “I write” in his storyboard corroborates my observation of his quiet demeanour in the classroom. He hardly talks when the class is in session. Occasionally he would borrow a sharpener or rubber from his friend who sits behind him. Rarely would he start a conversation and often he would listen attentively to his gentle-voiced teacher and follow her instructions. The storyboard identifies Kabelo as the boy who listens to his teacher.

Data Display 5.14: Kabelo’s storyboard on enjoying school

I play soccer, I am the goalie
I am writing
I play with my friends
I eat
I listen to teacher

Kabelo
Act 3 Scene 3: Enjoying meals

During breaks, he would collect a plate of warm food from the school's kitchen, along with many children. His meal would include cooked pap, baked beans, and vegetables. He would sit and eat quietly, return his empty plate to the kitchen and return to his friends. His reference to “ite” which means “I eat” in his storyboard, is about the hot meals that he enjoys during breaks.

Kabelo loves that he can eat a hot meal every day at school. Already in October 2018, his mother anticipated that he may be required to leave the school. She highlights that he would miss these daily hot meals, should he attend another school.
Act 3 Scene 4: On the playground

Playground-play would also involve group game-play, which often takes place close to the boys’ toilet. At every break when I observed Kabelo, he would play spontaneously with a group of the same boys and girls. Sometimes it would be soccer on the small piece of lawn near the toilets and not on the main playground where most of the children play.

Soccer play only includes boys.

“I play soccer at home and I play soccer at school with my friends. The one team is Pirates and the udder team is Chiefs.”

Kabelo consistently talks about his love for soccer, which is also evident from his storyboard about school life where he identifies himself as the goalkeeper. Sometimes he plays a game with both girls and boys that involves holding onto the waist from behind a chosen partner and then being dragged along for a ride in a circle.

Each child would do this to a partner and swop a few times as shown in the data display below. When the bell rings they all stop and move obediently towards their line, clap their hands ritualistically, and then move back to class.

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15 Pirates refers to Orlando Pirates, a soccer team founded in Soweto in 1937 and Chief refers to Kaiser Chiefs. Both teams are popular professional football teams in South Africa.
Act 3 Scene 5: Heritage Day in the classroom

On 21 September 2017, the school celebrated Heritage Day. All the children and teachers dressed in traditional garments. Kabelo's tradition animal-print t-shirt was covered with a non-traditional blue tracksuit top. The class sang songs in Sesotho and Isizulu and recited poems. The student-teachers were roped in to perform praise-songs or recite poems. Kabelo was actively dancing and singing to all the songs most of the time. On some occasions though, he sat quietly and smiled at all the activity around him.

These scenes about school life reveal Kabelo's love for his school, the warm food that he can eat there, his friends, his teacher, and the school's activities. They also reveal his love for soccer through his allusion to two of the well-known soccer teams in Soweto, symbolising its influential soccer culture.

His school, Joy of Learning Primary, is a public, post-apartheid school established in 2008 based in Soweto, registered with the Gauteng Department of Education.

It has solid brick buildings with a neat, well-kept garden and a large playground in the centre. It boasts a library, an ICT centre, and clean toilets for girls and boys with a recycling station. The school also has an established School Governing Body (SGB), School Management Team (SMT) and School Based Support Team (SBST) as well as a partnership with four other schools in Gauteng and the University of Johannesburg.

It offers two classes per grade in the Foundation Phase, in Isizulu and Sesotho respectively.

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16 Heritage Day is a public holiday on 24 September in South Africa dedicated to celebrating the diversity of the country’s cultural heritage.

Right: Data Display 5.17: Heritage Day in class
Both Kabelo and his mother revealed that he engages in pretend-play. In the one case the pretend-play is reported by his mother whereas in the other case I bore witness to his shared pretend-play with his peers.

**Act 4 Scene 1: I play school**

“Class, keep quiet and say after me. Dis is a house. Dis is a car”. This is how Kabelo described to me that he played school at his home in Moletsane. He says that he is the teacher and his friends and relatives are the students in the class. He reportedly gives the class instructions and he wants the children to listen. His mother along with three other mothers confirmed during a focus group discussion, that each of their sons ‘play school’ in this way.

Shafika: who are you hitting?
Kabelo: I am hitting amaphoyisa.
Shafika: Why?
Kamu: De police hit de people
Kabelo: Yes dey hit de people near Maponya

**Act 4 Scene 2: I am hitting amaphoyisa**

During our breaks at one of our Saturday morning workshops with the four boys, when they thought I was not looking, I observed with keen interest how each grabbed a puppet doll in the play lab at the Centre for Education Practice Research (CEPR). Each of them repeatedly beat the puppets with their fists.

Kamu is another of the boys whose favourite cell phone game involves shooting police officers. These two scenes of pretend-play provide insight on the preoccupations that Kabelo and his friends sit with. They communicate three themes: the influence of schooled narratives in Kabelo’s life, as well as narratives of violence. They also communicate a shared understanding among the boys related to the violence theme. Kabelo goes further and suggests that he has borne witness to a police officer beating someone at the local shopping mall. These pretend-play themes also emerge in other forms of Kabelo’s play such as his exposure to violence which are explained further on.
like playing ‘topo’. “You take the topo you take the string, you make like dis and you throw it hard. You pick it up with your hand”. This was how Kabelo explained that he played with a spinning top with other boys. There were reportedly no girls playing with them. They just hit the topo hard and let it spin on their hands.

Act 5 Scene 2: I don’t know dis Lego® game

Kabelo was usually escorted by his mother to the University of Johannesburg’s Soweto Campus on Saturday mornings to participate in focus group discussions with three other boys or join us for our digital storytelling workshops. His mother would sit in one room while we met in the play lab at the Centre for Education Practice Research (CEPR). Sometimes I would meet the mothers of the four boys in the meeting room while the boys would be ushered into the play lab.

At the first of these discussions, I escorted the boys to the play lab while meeting with their mothers. I left an enclosed box of Lego® blocks on the table. I asked whether any of them had seen the blocks and the two boys and a girl confirmed that they had never played with Lego® before. I left them for the hour that I had with the mothers. We all watched them from time to time through the mirrored glass. At one point Kabelo came running to us as said excitedly: “See I make dis truck”.

Act 5 Scene 3: Making sandwiches and following TV recipes

As I was talking to his grandfather on one of my afternoon visits to Moletsane in October 2017, Kabelo had arrived from school, went directly to his room towards the back of the house and emerged wearing a neatly ironed T-shirt, shorts and sandals. He then headed to the kitchen. A few minutes later, he emerged in the dining room with a plate of sandwiches and a mug of black tea that he had prepared himself.
He also made his peanut butter sandwich by himself. The sandwich on his plate was neatly cut in half. He sat quietly at the table, watching the adults talk to each other.

According to his mother, he would see something on TV and then say “Mummy, let’s make that. He would take out the ingredients from the cupboard and we would try out the recipe.”

**Act 5 Scene 4: I wash my clothes**

“I make myself dirty so I washing my clothes. Yoh, it’s dirty”, said Kabelo as he rubbed his clothes in a tub filled with water depicted in one of his self-made videos which shows him washing clothes. He says he washes his clothes many times. According to his mother, Kabelo likes to wash his clothes but he does this from time to time and not routinely.

At one of the visits to his grandfather’s home in Moletsane, his grandfather said that he loved to clean up and that gets up early in the morning to wash his grandfather’s car on Saturday mornings.
Act 5 Scene 5: Getting ready for school

Kabelo also prepares himself for going to school in the morning on his own. His storyboard presentation at one of the digital story-telling workshops that I hosted with three other boys, an expert videographer/ ECD specialist, and a research assistant, revealed this. The storyboard below includes Kabelo’s talk as he explained his morning routine to the workshop audience.

I was struck by the accuracy of his drawing of the clock at 4 am and that he woke up so early in the morning. According to his mother, he wakes up at 5 am so that he could be ready for the driver. She wanted him to be at school early so that he would not be rushed and that he could have some time to himself before school starts. His storyboard and the way he related his morning routine at the workshop also shows that he prepares himself for school and has some time to watch TV while he waits for the driver to collect him.

His mother said that the driver collects him at 06h00 in the morning. She also said that he goes to bed by 19h30 especially during weekdays.

These scenes on Kabelo’s game-play, designing, making and working. They also reveal a dutiful sense of responsibility in the home and a sense of agency and self-discipline in the way he structures his mornings before school.
Kabelo’s digital world is a significant part of his everyday playworld. Visits to his home and focus group discussions involving him and separately, his mother, reveal the nature and extent of his digital footprint. Here digital footprint is a measure of all the digital activities, artefacts, actions, communications that are traceable as data on digital devices and on the Internet (Dictionary.com, n.d.).

**Act 6 Scene 1: Digital footprint**

Kabelo’s mother says that in their homes in both Moletsane and Dobsonville and later in Mapetla, they have a radio; one smartphone which Kabelo uses which belongs to her, and a feature phone. They have a digital satellite television (DSTV) subscription with Multichoice, a South African media company. They also own an Explora that enables television-on-demand by recording programmes that can be watched at a time that is convenient.

They own a DVD player and a handheld Leap-pad game player and Kabelo has a TV in his bedroom in Moletsane and Dobsonville which moved with them to Mapetla. On the smartphone he watches movies, plays games, takes photos, makes videos, looks at videos of others and at photos sent by others.

He reads and is read to less than once a week; watches TV several times a day, watches DVD less than once a week; has never played video games on a console player or a social game online with other children, in any of their homes. He also watches online videos and plays games on a mobile device several times a
He often watches music videos; is engaged in video gaming; watches animal and learning videos. He sometimes edits pictures and videos on a mobile device; watches home-language TV; uses WhatsApp sometimes; uses a mobile device when he eats at home; uses a mobile device when he is in a car or on public transport and watches TV or videos in the hour before bedtime. This snapshot of digital access and use at home by Katleho was reported in a survey questionnaire and focus group discussion. My home visits corroborated these findings.

During the first few months of my fieldwork Kabelo made regular use of his mother’s Samsung smart phone. “When I get the data, he just downloads”, says his mother. He would encourage her to buy data and airtime at the local shop in Dobsonville so that he could download games and communicate with friends and family via WhatsApp.

Kabelo also has access to two different digital toys. These include LeapPad which his mother bought so that it could help him learn, and a toy laptop which was meant to teach him English but which seems to contain a voice-over in another language.

In March 2019, his father bought him his own tablet which he could purchase at his place of work at a discounted price. Here too, he would download games and English lessons.

Kabelo’s mother says that she downloads apps that are free but she needs to pay for data which “costs a lot of money”. While Kabelo has access to a range of digital devices, he does not always have access to data. This was evident when I would send WhatsApp messages to Kabelo’s mother and she would only respond after a few days because, according to her: “I didn’t have data”.

Act 6 Scene 2: Making selfies and videos

Kabelo’s mother’s phone contains numerous photos taken by Kabelo, of himself. These were photos of him posing with friends and relatives as well as videos that his mother took of him dancing. “It’s me. I jive”, he says when I looked at the video of him dancing.

“Me-I am taking a selfie. I feel happy about taking photos because I like photos because it’s nice and it is fun and it makes me happy.”

The mobile phone that I gave him as part of this research project, also contained many pictures and videos, similar to the photos and videos on his mother’s phone. The photos were mainly of himself, many of which were ‘selfies’, of him smiling, pouting, in a ‘gangsta’ pose, posing with his school uniform, posing at his new school gate, near his classroom posing with his sister, posing with his mother and his grandfather.
In some cases, he decorated the photos with various frames. In addition to his self-made videos of his homes in Dobsonville and Mapetla, he creates videos of his Sunday church attendance and swimming in the Pimville swimming pool. The rest of his self-made video clips contains recordings of him dancing to local music or musical scenes of local artists performing on TV.

They also include some clips from Cartoon Network or Msanzi TV, or of him singing gospel songs in Sesotho while pottering around the house. The opening scene of his digital story was a video-recording of the iconic Hugh Masekela singing ‘Thuma Mina’, a few weeks before it assumed popularity as a rallying cry of the Ramaphosa presidency in South Africa.

He also recorded significant chunks of the funeral of Winnie Madikizela Mandela a leading political figure in South Africa, on his phone while it was showing on television. All of his self-produced videos are conducted in English and his recordings of rap music and Msansi TV channel programmes are in Sesotho with the latter showing English subtitles.

On one afternoon visit to his Dobsonville home, Kabelo was in the back room of the house with his mother’s phone. “I love Orlando Pirates”, he said, showing me an emblem that he downloaded on his mother’s phone, of Orlando Pirates, a well-known soccer team in Soweto. He shows me how he decorated a photograph of his mother’s wedding day with an Orlando Pirates emblematic logo.

18 Thumma Mina means ‘send me’. It is a song written and performed by world-renowned South African musician Hugh Masekela who died on 23 January 2018 during my field work. The song’s lyrics featured prominently as the rallying manifesto of the President-elect at the time Mr Cyril Ramaphosa.

Left: Data display 5.24: Kabelo’s selfies
Act 6 Scene 2: Digital learning

Kabelo’s mother believes that the digital technologies, that Kabelo has access to at home can help him with learning. This includes the television. She stated in my screen-time survey and in a focus group discussion with the other three mothers, that Kabelo loves to watch the news and Animal Planet", which “helps him with his school work”. She also downloads mobile learning applications for him on her mobile phone.

Learning with mobile apps

Kabelo was playing with WordSearch, an app on his mother’s mobile phone on one of my Friday afternoon visits to Moletsane in October 2017. When I asked Kabelo if he downloaded the app he said that he did not and pointed to his mother. They argued over who downloaded it. He insisted that it was her.

"Mother: This is good. It teaches him how to spell English words
Shafika: Did you download it?
Kabelo: No
Shafika: Do you play that game
Kabelo: Sometimes. (playing on the app)
Shafika: Do you like it:
Kabelo: No (shaking head)
....
Shafika: But it’s a good game. Your mother did a good thing. Do you agree?
Kabelo: No"
When asked which mobile apps he likes most, Kabelo referred to the truck driving game app called Euro Trucks.

"Kabelo: I can drive a truck
Shafika: Show me. Why do you want to learn to drive a truck
Kabelo: Because it lets me to driving cars
Shafika: What kind of car
Kabelo: A Maserati
Shafika: Yoooh you need a lot of money for that car"

Kabelo showed me how he uses the control icons on the mobile app to steer the vehicle in motion and to park it in designated parking bay. He also downloaded a car driving game where he beat other cars in a race. “I love this game because I can drive fast”, he tells me while playing the game.

His mother also believes that the truck game provides him with knowledge about how to drive and park a car or a truck. “When I drive my car, he tells me “mummy you must put the car into neutral now” when I am at a robot, and now you must put the car in first gear and drive mummy” when the robot turns green.”

Learning with digital toys

In December 2017, at a visit to his Dobsonville home, Kabelo showed me his LeapPad.

He practised his English on the LeapPad. However, the disks were too expensive, said his mother. He only had this one – showing us a disk containing the applications that Kabelo played on the LeapPad.
Learning with the tablet

When they moved to Mapetla, as shown earlier, he also acquired his tablet on which he plays games, downloads music and according to him: "I do my homework on the tablet. I use Google". For Kabelo, doing homework is a reference to doing searches on themes related to his homework assignments. Life Orientation projects.

His tablet screen showed applications to learn how to spell English words and grammar; learn Mathematics; games that involve playing football and driving fast cars; an app to store music; Uber; WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, two different bible applications and an app called ShareIt which allows him to offline sharing of games with his friends.

The one bible app was downloaded by his mother, specifically for Kabelo. It is a text and audio app where a voice-over in an American English accent, reads out the text to him. The text is quite complex. Kabelo says he reads the bible app every Friday for 20 minutes. But when asked to read the text on Deuteronomy, he said he did not know how to read it and that he could not understand the lady reading out the text.

Act 6 Scene 3: I play da car game

Kabelo prefers to play a racing car game because of its entertainment value it seems. He downloaded an application on his mother’s phone and on the phone that I gave him. These games involve racing other cars and dodging obstacles along the way.
Act 6 Scene 4: I like watching the news and I love cartoons

When asked which programmes he liked to watch on TV he said: “I like watching the news”. His self-made videos reveal his love for cartoons and local soap operas that depict township life.

During the focus group discussion that included the mothers of the four boys, Kabelo’s mother said that his favourite TV programmes include Cartoon Network and all the Mzansi TV channels including the music channels. She also reported that in addition to these channels, he also watches Animal Planet and cooking channels.

He and the other three boys also make reference to downloading and watching movies of which the Fast and Furious series rank among the most popular.

His mother reports at the focus group discussion in October 2017 that Kabelo watches TV with her and her husband but when there are programmes at night that have an age restriction Kabelo would say: “Mummy hambo lala (go sleep)”

Act 6 Scene 5: Managing screen time

Kabelo’s mother agrees strongly that the less time children spend on screen media the better off they are. She also agrees that the child benefits from screen media; she strongly disagrees that it is difficult that he stops using screen media when she asks and she strongly agrees that she is satisfied with the amount and quality of educational screen media is available to him. She limits his screen time and thinks he spends the right amount of time with screen media.

Data display 5.30: Watching cartoons
She hit my teacher. She come in and hit here, here and here [showing different areas of the chest]. It make me sad”. Kabelo tells the story of the way a mother of one of the girls in his Grade 2 class reportedly stormed into their class and attacked his teacher whom he loves dearly.

Kabelo tells me in detail how the girl’s mother came into the class, how she assaulted his teacher, and how his teacher responded. What saddened him and made him worry was that the teacher did not come to school for a few days after the incident.

His mother said he was traumatised by this incident. He reportedly cried when he related the story to her.
Act 7 Scene 1: Some Boys Like to Beat Udder Boys

As much as the school brings joy to Kabelo’s life, some boys made his life miserable at school. At one of the workshops with all four boys, Kabelo said: “There is a boy. His name is Sipho\textsuperscript{20}. He like to kick me”. The other boy in the group replied: “Yes, he like to kick us”.

At a subsequent focus group discussion Kabelo elaborated on his fear at school.

\textbf{Kabelo:} Some boys like to beat udder boys….Like Sipho at Joyful Learning Primary School. He likes to beat Bongani who is a boy. He also kick me.

\textbf{Shafika:} Are you afraid of him?

\textbf{Kabelo:} Yes

\textbf{Shafika:} Are the other boys afraid of him?

\textbf{Kabelo:} Yes. Sipho, Bongani, Thabo, Nathi. They are friends. They like to beat us. Sipho has a sister. His name is Thandi. Last week he beat his sister. His sister is not afraid of him. Sipho also beats Bongani. (Laughter). Bongani is not scary of him.

They do like this. Is your pen. They do like this. And then me I like tell teacher. Last week Sipho take my pen and my rubber and my pencil. Sipho has many pencils. He likes to steal udder children’s pencil. And also, he use a pin. Dis is de pin. Dis is the pencil case. De pin is inside. They say take dis thing. Then you labeya.

\textsuperscript{20} Sipho is a pseudonym as are all names in this scene

Bottom right: Data display 5.33: Kabelo and his friends feel victimised by bullies

They like to do that to me.

Sipho like to beat girls. And Sipho likes to beat da big people in Grade 7, Grade 6 and Grade 5 and Grade 4.

\textbf{Shafika:} How do you handle this? What do you do?

\textbf{Kabelo:} I go to the principal and tell [the deputy principal]

\textbf{Shafika:} And does that help?

\textbf{Kabelo:} No. When you call him to go to the principal, he does not go.
Kabelo’s teacher said that she was aware of the bullying behaviour of Sipho and his friends and that the school management was aware of it too. According to her, Sipho’s father had just been released from prison and was trying to making amends with Sipho. However, in the township, Sipho was reportedly being bullied by older boys. She said that the playground is the ‘territory’ where Sipho reigned and terrorised the boys and girls before class, early in the morning and during breaks. It seemed from the testimony of Kabelo and the boys however, Sipho’s ‘territory’ included the classroom when the teacher was not looking.

During my classroom observations, I found evidence that bullying was discussed in class. On one occasion, a group of university students were hosting a short play and discussion with the Grade 2s. On the walls are pictures that reference cyber-bullying and bullying.

■ Act 7 Scene 2: Sipho plays zwebi

At one of our focus group discussions, Kabelo leaned forward and whispered to me conspiratorially, “Sipho plays zwebi”. “What’s that”, I ask.

“You spin the coin. The winner takes the money. It’s like dis. It’s the money, it not look like another money. When look like another money. He take this one. But his not look.”

Zwebi is a game that involves gambling, which explained the whisper, as if he knew and thought that it was not appropriate to play such a game. According to Kabelo these boys often play this gambling game during breaks, on the playground.

A limited number of news articles from Soweto newspapers, report on gambling among youth at school (City Press, 2011), even though they are dated. Less is reported about zwebi in particular. Scott & Barr, 2013 makes a brief mention of it as one form of informal gambling in South African townships. In general however, the prevalence of gambling among children at school is understudied.

■ Act 7 Scene 3: Mpalma21-klap at home and in the ‘kasi’

My mudder and my fadder last of last year, in 2016 with my mudder and my fadder, my fadder was drunk and my fadder beat my mudder with face in here and my mudder had a blue eye here but my fadder before my fadder goes to hospital and my fadder was there in hospital and at the Florida. My mother beat him again. With the mpalma here.

This is how Kabelo related an incident where his father beat his mother and she fought back by giving him a mpalma-klap back. He also relates an incident that he witnessed in the township.

“Yesterday in my sister’s home. I see when I go to my home. Me and my mudder. I see the man beat woman. The man beat woman with the face in here. And the woman beat him with the mpalma.”

Kabelo explained that this happens “when the man takes drugs and wine.”

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21 Mpalma is a township slang reference to the palm of the hand which is used when slapping or smacking someone. To give someone a mpalma means to give someone smack with the palm of the hand.
Play and care
A gentleman tucks in his shirt

“A gentleman always tucks in his shirt and always wears socks with his tekkies”, according to Kabelo. He wanted to be a gentleman, and he wanted to get married one day so that his wife can cook for him.

Kabelo’s role model is his grandfather who took him on drives in his car. His father is also another significant male figure in Kabelo’s life. He always talked about his daddy and his phone contained a few photos of his father at home.

In December 2017, his mother said that his father is disengaged from Kabelo’s life. “He comes home from work and doesn’t talk to Kabelo, she says. He doesn’t pay for things that Kabelo needs.”

“Being a boy means having a car and a bike and business – some girls have these things. Some girls also play soccers”, said Kabelo in his focus group discussion with one of the boys in his class.

■ Act 8 Scene 1: They say in instruction boys must not beat girls

Kabelo also suggests ways to deal with situations of violence.

They say in instruction boys must not beat girls. Boys cannot beat girls and girls cannot beat boys. This is the instruction of the South Africa. …..It’s a bad thing. When he is young father. He gonna do this thing to his girlfriend and to his uhh friends. It means to you never give wrong words to your girlfriend. You never cheat to your girlfriend. And you never chi-ka22. And you never fight with him you never fight with other adults. You never chika your son. You never spit and you never be angry to your friends and your child.

You must tell the principal. Principal must call Sipho’s mother. Sipho’s mother must come to school. ….Sipho must go to a social worker.

Kabelo reassures me however, I am a good boy. I don’t be nyaope23. I don’t stealing. I don’t bullying. I don’t beat udder boys.

Here Kabelo reflects on ways in which the endemic violence that he is exposed to, can be addressed. He also shows that he has a sense of agency to address this problem.

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22 Chika is a colloquial Sesotho which means to shout.
23 Nyaope, also known as whoonga is a drug made up of a cocktail of substances including heroine the use of which has been reported across Soweto
# Learner Profile

**GDE**

CONFIDENTIAL
Keep in a safe place

**LEARNER PROFILE**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE:</th>
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Formal School System (GET and FET Bands)

**Surname:**

**Names:**

(As per Birth Certificate)
Kabelo displayed reading difficulties in different settings: in his test scores; during my observations of him at home; during English lessons in the classroom; in assessment reports written by the school psychologist and during interviews with his teacher, his mother and school psychologist.

Below are two examples of his underperforming scores in a Grade 2 class test for Sesotho and English First Additional Language (EFAL). It shows a 50 per cent score for Sesotho and a 30 per cent score.

It also shows that he had a poorer score for phonics in Sesotho, scoring 11 out of 30 compared to comprehension where he scored 8 out of 10. It further shows that he scored lowest marks for EFAL comprehension and phonics in EFAL. These scores provide further evidence of Kabelo’s struggles in Sesotho and EFAL.
**Joy of Learning Primary School**

**Sesotho**
Grade 2
Date: 10 March 2017
Marks: 60
Answer the questions and write neatly

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<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
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<td>11</td>
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</table>

Mark achieved: 30/60

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**Joy of Learning Primary School**

**English First Additional Language Task**
Grade 2
Date: 12 June 2017
Marks: 60
Answer the questions and write neatly

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<th>Marks</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
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Mark achieved: 18/60
Kabelo: I struggle to see the words of the books. Sometimes it is the first word and the last word. The sentence, I struggle to get to the end. Sometimes I read words that I don’t know of the books but some I know. .... Sometimes I read, tears come out of my eyes. Because it is something with my eyes. The tears disturbing me and sometimes it goes in the book. My mother knows but not my teachers. .... But I like reading, I like to read newspapers. And, the instructions. I read, the book of the school.

Shafika: You mean the workbook?

Kabelo: Yes, the workbook. The book is about the grandfather. ....[this is Sesotho reading book about a grandfather who lost his glasses. In English the title translates as Grandpa’s Glasses].

This was the second time Kabelo referred to his eyes when we talk about his difficulties with reading. When asked how he feels about his reading struggles, he says: It makes me sad as shown in the adjacent picture he drew.

During a focus group discussion with another boy he said that he believes he needs to work hard and practise in order to improve his reading.

He was writing down his plan for his story board on his reading struggles.
My encounter with Kabelo’s reading struggles emerged during classroom observations and visits to his home.

Act 9 Scene 1: “How do you spell stretching?”

It was a sunny morning in October 2017. I sat quietly at the back of the classroom to observe Kabelo in an English First Additional Language (EFAL) lesson by his Sesotho-speaking teacher.

The teacher hands out a picture to each of the children and asks them to talk about what they see. Different children put up their hands, including Kabelo. She calls on three of them, and each says respectively:

“Neo is playing with a ball”. “The baby is crying”. “Bongani is doing cart-wheels”. She praised each of them for their excellent answers.

She asks them to paste the picture in their workbooks and then write a paragraph. She explains what a paragraph is. Each of the children proceed with writing their sentences.

Kabelo goes toward her to ask how to spell the word playing. She shows him a wall with words that she had already printed out neatly and pasted on the wall. She asks him what the first letter of the word playing was. He said the letter ‘p.’ She then ask him in Sesotho to look at the site-words on the board and then to point to words that start with ‘p’ on the wall. He finds the word ‘people’. “Good”, she says encouragingly. She asks him where the word ‘playing’ was on the list of words on the wall.

He calls me to help him with the sentence: Neo is stretching. “How do you spell stretching”, he asks. I ask him to try to spell it out himself. I pronounce the word phonetically and ask him to spell the word. I then realise that my pronunciation confuses him because he ask if my ‘e’ sound in stretching, was an ‘a’ as in the word ‘apple’. I relent and write it out for him. He copies the word ‘stretching’ in his note-book.
I saw how the teacher explained the English words to Kabelo in Sesotho and how this seemed to make the exercise more understandable for him. I also realised that the way I pronounced words in my South African English accent and my attempts at spelling out words phonetically confused him because he heard me differently.

His teacher says in her interview with me, that she often sees him memorise the texts of the reader that he takes home. He practises with his mother until he knows the text so well that he recites the text without looking at the pages. For example, he recognises a complex word like ‘elephant’ in the text.

When she told me the story of Kabelo memorising texts to recite in class, as if pretending to read, I thought to myself that he must have quite a good memory to remember the way the words are spelled and that it showed him to be very diligent.

This reminded me of my own childhood when I was taught to read Arabic text at the Moslem school that I attended in the afternoons after school. I was about 10 years old then. I recall writing the Arabic text out in English, memorising them and then reciting them aloud to my Khalifah (teacher). I also pretended that I could read the text and unlike Kabelo, I succeeded in fooling the Khalifa.

When I asked his teacher: how do you explain his reading difficulty, she said:

“For me I think it was quite difficult to fully understand what he really struggled with. Because he could speak the language, he was more proficient in spoken Sesotho than spoken English so in that regard, in terms of communication he would feel more comfortable in Sesotho than in English.

In English, he had to think very hard about what he is going to say. In a written sense, I think he struggled with encoding. The struggles to put the sounds together in English doesn’t struggle to break them apart but putting them together like play – different sounds he hears but struggles to put it together. So he was not able to join sounds together in both languages equally so. In Sesotho he struggled, you know you could ask him what sound this is, he could tell you, this is an ‘A,’ this is a ‘b’, this is a ‘c’, this is a ‘d’”.

She explained further:

But I just always felt there was only so much I could do because there was only so much that I knew, specially how to remediate reading and writing because I don’t necessarily think that the SBST were able to meet his needs because nobody in the SBST has Inclusive Education training or experience in terms of working with learners like that.

So the only support that he would get would be in the form of remediating his phonemic awareness his decoding skills and encoding skills. But I just think to some extent it would help him cope, to learn those words and filling them out. Because there would be words like elephant, he just knew words like that [clicking fingers from memory, even if he sees the words he would know, this is elephant. There are words that he actually knew as site words and he did not even struggle with those words.
Act 9 Scene 2: “See here are my books:

“See, here are my books my mudder buy for me”, said Kabelo enthusiastically when Koketso and I visited his Dobsonville home one early afternoon in December 2017. Kabelo was on holiday at the time. When we arrived, he was in his bedroom playing on his mother’s phone. He joined us in the lounge and had a few books in his hand.

Shafika: Oh wow, are these your books.  
Kabelo: Yes  
Mother: Yes, I use these to read to him  
Shafika: Are these all English books. Do you have any Sesotho books  
Kabelo: No  
Mother: No, only English ones. My mother is the one who likes to read him Sesotho books. She’s got some at home.

One of the books was entitled: Pooh’s Grand Adventure, In Search of Christopher Robin.

Shafika: Who is that? (pointing to the picture of Pooh Bear)  
Kabelo: I don’t know (shrugging his shoulders)  
Shafika: That’s his name (pointing to the word Pooh in the title)
As Koketso went through the first sentence, we both realised that he could name the letters but battled with naming the way the letters sounded in each word. After trying the first sentence, they stopped with the exercise.

**Koketso:** Point to the word so that it doesn’t confuse you. So you put your hand there neh

**Kabelo:** Eh

**Koketso:** The letter sound neh. I don’t want the letter name like Pee or Oh neh. I want the sound like pu or buh neh. Let’s try. Don’t forget the finger. What’s that word? Pooh. It is the same as this one here, turning over the book to the cover.

**Kabelo:** Oh. Pooh

**Koketso:** Yes the next one?

Kabelo turns over to the cover again.

**Koketso:** It’s not going to be the same.

**Kabelo:** Pooh.

Stops and moves to the adjacent page.

**Koketso:** Please try this one. It is Pooh buh buh. Pooh bear. Do you know what a bear is? Ok let’s go. Those words are easier. Pooh bear

**Kabelo:** Pooh bear

**Koketso:** Use this finger

**Kabelo:** I don’t know this word

**Koketso:** Let’s try it with the letter sound

**Kabelo:** Its letter

**Koketso:** What letter sound is that?

**Kabelo:** ehh, wuh

**Koketso:** wuh neh, wuh neh. And the next one?

**Kabelo:** as in Ay

This incident took place in the lounge, with the DSTV playing and his mother sitting with a novel in her hand, with a visible bookmark indicating that she had read about half of the book already.
As soon as Kabelo followed by Koketso left to the other room Kabelo’s mother confided:

I know Kabelo has a real problem. I am open about that. I just don’t know what to do. The school says he must go to another school. But they don’t tell me what I can do to help him. What do you think of Saturday schools, Shafika. Maybe that will help.

These scenes shed an important spotlight on the extent of Kabelo’s reading struggles, his mother’s perspective, his teacher’s viewpoint and importantly, how Kabelo experienced this struggle in his voice. It shows that he had exposure to a literacy culture at home with signs of his mother reading, his books (albeit that they may be inappropriate for his age), newspapers and digital resources that serve to encourage him to learn how to read.

There appears to be a concern about what and how to respond to his difficulties with reading from his mother and a sense of limitation by his teacher to support him further and her view that the school was not capable of providing him with the support he needed.

Act 9 Scene 3: “I was in Grade 1 for two years”

Kabelo: I was in Grade 1 for two years
Shafika: What was that like?
Kabelo: It make me sad when the children laugh at me.
Shafika: Who laughed at you?
Kabelo: The children in Grade 2.

Kabelo’s friend was a bit more expressive about the experience when I spoke to him on the playground during one of the breaks. He also repeated Grade 1 with Kabelo in 2016. He said that they were a big group who repeated Grade 1.

Friend: Teacher it felt like dying.
Friend: We see all our friends going to Grade 2 and we are staying behind. But my mother said I must ignore the guys who are teasing me. A lot of people tease me. Even the uncle who cleans the garden here at Joy of Learning calls me a fat boy. It hurts me.

Friend: But we are over that now and we are going to Grade 3 next year.

Kabelo and his friend made me realise what I think my own son may have felt when he repeated Grade R and what my cousin must have felt when he repeated Standard 2 and I went on to Standard 3. I also wondered if the school provided any opportunity to talk to the children who repeated a grade.
**Act 9 Scene 4: Kabelo is severely cognitively challenged**

The reasons for repeating Grade 1 and for the school’s decision for him leave and attend a school for learners with special educational needs (LSEN), was expressed in the psycho-educational assessment report written by the school’s educational psychologist and co-signed by a professor at the university.

The second assessment report stated:

“The assessment acknowledged Kabelo as a ‘confident’, ‘delightful’ boy who is a pleasure to work with and has a ‘ready smile’.

This report concluded that his cognitive functioning was below average for his age group; that he was not coping in Grade 2; that he was struggling to read and comprehend; and that he still showed significant gaps in his learning which will need to be addressed in a special school.

This corroborated the report of his performance that was reflected in his Learner Profile, as shown in data display 5.42.

23.03.17. Mrs K: Kabelo has been referred for assessment. He is being supported in English and Sesotho to help him to cope better. He is on…to help him manage his behaviour.

30.04.17. Mrs K: Kabelo is receiving support for both English and Sesotho. He relies on his memory but cannot apply concepts that he has learned. Kabelo needs additional support in identifying and writing sounds in both languages.

24.05.17. Mrs K: Kabelo is still struggling with reading and writing and needs intense support for both languages.

02.06.17 Mrs K: Kabelo is continuing but we need to find the real cause for his barrier to reading and writing. Kabelo is still to cope with workload in Grade 2 and is receiving support from the teacher.
A Learner Profile is an official standard Department of Basic Education (DBE) and Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) document that provides a more holistic, cumulative record of the learner’s qualities, strengths and weaknesses as reported regularly by the learner’s educators. The Learner Profile of Kabelo confirmed that he had been regularly assessed; that he struggled with reading and writing and needed ‘intense support’.

The educational psychologist based at the school believed that the School Based Support Team (SBST) did all they could to support Kabelo at Joy of Learning Primary.

Evidently the school psychologist called out the advantages that Kabelo had by having access to a school psychologist and an established School Based Support Team at the school that were able to provide him with the support he needed. She highlights that in another school he would very likely have struggled much more.

These scenes reflect both Kabelo’s experience of underperformance at school and the story of his cognitive challenges from the perspective of the education system. It provides the evidence that led to the school’s decision that he had to leave Joy of Learning Primary School and attend a school for learners with special education needs (LSEN).

In these scenes we also hear Kabelo’s voice about his struggles with reading, his experience with repeating a grade and how these struggles make him feel.

“Here he got a lot more support than he would have gotten anywhere else. So what happened was that the problems were identified early. ……..In both cases, the teachers were willing to differentiate and they were very able. They were very good at managing him. Got a good feel of who he was and was passionate in terms of we need to meet his needs whatever it takes. You don’t get that in all our teachers here and you don’t get that in all schools. So, I think what would have happened is that he would have been classified as massive behaviour problem. And he would have been repeatedly punished if he was anywhere else. And he would not necessarily have been delved into to identify his problems and to give him that kind of support. I think if you are having conversations with the powers that be that said how can we support these underperforming boys, it would be largely in terms of developing teachers to be aware of picking up on children’s difficulties, getting the right kind of support, providing the differentiation. Even in terms of schooling teachers as to how to have conversations with the parents.
Recognition and resolution
I love my new school

The decision to move Kabelo to another school was ratified by the end of January 2018 when Kabelo had already started his first two weeks in Grade 3 at his old school.

By 1 February 2018, he made the move to School of the Future, where Kabelo was placed in a class with a male teacher. The school is located just outside of Soweto. It takes his mother 25 minutes to get there in the mornings, although she had hired a driver to transport him to and from his new school.

According to the Department of Basic Education EMIS database (DBE, 2018), the School of the Future was a former House of Assembly school which means that under Apartheid, it was reserved for those who were classified as white.

According to his mother, he was also assessed by another male teacher at this school. This contrasts with his exposure mainly to women teachers since he commenced his schooling in pre-school in 2013.

Interviews with his mother revealed that Kabelo is given a lot more support at the LSEN school. Here he has access to an occupational therapist and a speech therapist. His mother was also successful in her application to have the school fees waived for the 2018 school year.

Kabelo said that he had 11 people in his class and there were girls and boys who spoke Afrikaans in his class. He also says that he made a piggy bank during their art class. He plays soccer with his new-found friends during the breaks but this time, he has to take his own food to school. He missed the warm meals at his other school. He also said that the principal of the school knows him and greets him whenever he walks past him in the corridors or when he visits the class.
He likes that his class is small and that the teacher comes to him a lot and helps him with his reading.

I love Mr S and I love the principal. I like that they help me with reading. I get good marks at this school. I am in Grade 4 at this school and not in Grade 3.

For this reason, Kabelo would have been in an appropriate grade, based on his assessment at the school.

At our focus group discussions, during interviews and home visits in February and March 2018, Kabelo consistently and repeatedly said on each occasion that he was happy at his new school and that he was fond of his class teacher.

He particularly likes that he is making various artefacts like the piggy bank with newspapers and glue every week and that he believes that he is in Grade 4. As part of an inclusive approach towards supporting learners who face learning barriers, LSEN public schools deliver a differentiated curriculum and have a different system of grades to public ordinary schools (Department of Basic Education, 2014).
Findings

The ten inter-related acts in Kabelo's slice of life, illuminate how his worlds of play, knowing, making and academic performance are lived out, in and across a range of Soweto township settings.

Across the ten acts, there are elements of support and recognition, as well as tensions between his childlike play and the world of academic performance. All of these are portrayed against the backdrop of the complexities of black, urban, working class, township life.

Kabelo's knowing

Kabelo’s knowing is reflected in his introduction and the scene that involved the drive through Soweto, as well as related scenes in subsequent dramatic acts.

When he introduces himself, we meet the playful child. We learn about the things he loves; what he plays; his favourite food and his aspiration to be an engineer and a truck driver.

Through Kabelo’s eyes, these vignettes reveal his agency and play capabilities.

Kabelo takes the adults on a tour of his Soweto, and the subtext beckons a call to the adults to yield to his knowledge. The car and Kabelo’s leadership role as a tour guide into his world, symbolise a space for Kabelo as a child to have a voice and show the adults the way.

Sen’s capability approach proposes that individuals have a sense of agency freedom when they can make a choice and have the freedom to play an active role in a given situation (Sen, 1999). In this situation, Kabelo had the freedom to play an active role, and he chose to play this role. His taking charge of providing directions reflected his confidence and freedom of choice.

He chose to speak in English in a way that the researcher and research translator understood him clearly. That he volunteered information about his life at his grandfather’s home, further suggests his confidence and comfort to speak openly about his life. The latter also reflects his sense of agency.

Based on Kleine’s (2011) choice framework model where she provides 11 agency elements, Kabelo’s agency is further reflected in his geographical and navigational capabilities knowledge of Soweto.

Kabelo showed that he was able to distinguish left from right. He was able to identify road signs such as the stop street. He knew where the traffic lights were and that we needed to drive when it turns green. He was able to recognise signs and symbols such as the garage and the mall. These were indications of Kabelo’s navigational capability. His spatial awareness contrasted with the knowledge of the computerised ge-positional system (GPS) that is symbolic of the machine world.

These capabilities resonate with Vygotsky’s (1978) theory on children’s everyday knowledge and its foundational and dialectical relationship with their development of scientific knowledge. Vygotsky coined these as spontaneous concepts which are also situated within their linguistic, social and cultural environment.

They progress from ‘bottom to top’, meaning children develop spontaneous concepts from their concrete everyday experience towards more general and abstract concepts. Moreover, for Vygotsky (1978) spontaneous concept development provides a foundation for the development of scientific concepts.
Moll (2014) uses the term ‘conceptual fabric’ to explain Vygotsky’s reference to the foundation that everyday concepts provide to develop scientific schooled concepts. Scientific concepts, therefore, grow into the everyday into the domain of personal experience, thereby acquiring meaning and significance (Moll, 2014 p.35).

It also resonates with the work of scholars of cognition and culture such as Lave (1998), Rogoff and Guitterez (2003) who contributed towards an understanding of everyday knowledge as everyday cognition.

Rogoff (2014) highlights how children learn through their everyday observations and that at home they are not ‘taught’; that they discover through attentive engagement in the activities of their families and communities, thereby demonstrating the interactions and intersections of the individual with interpersonal and cultural and community life.

**Act 2: Soweto as a vast playground**

Kabelo’s Soweto is a vast multi-sited complex canvas upon which he paints a portrait that converges with and diverges from, the adults’ portrayal of him. Through his Soweto, we bear witness to his exposure to global popular cultures in the form of Steers burgers and digital and consumer products available at shopping malls and in digital virtual spaces both of which are also playgrounds for Kabelo. He reconciles his consumption of these global artefacts with local products such as kwotas, music by local artists, local radio at his grandfather’s house and local business in the form of his grandfather’s tavern and the spaza shops where he buys kwotas.

Soweto’s illustrious political history is alsoemblazoned in Kabelo’s life, evident too from his comments about South Africa’s political leadership. The graveyard, church and swimming pool are additional playgrounds in Kabelo’s Soweto where communication also takes place in Sesotho interspersed with different African languages spoken in his family and the parts of Soweto that Kabelo inhabits.

Biggeri (2004) suggests that children’s capabilities and functions are also partially affected by the capabilities and functions of their parents. He refers to their income levels and socio-economic circumstances. The move to their own, more resourced home in Mapetla and his father’s purchase of a tablet for Kabelo, are examples of how the material conditions changed and enabled the development of Kabelo’s capabilities.

That Kabelo is multi-lingual is reflected in his ability to speak his dominant home language, Sesotho, with confidence when he talks with his parents and relatives. He also understands Setswana, SiSwati and IsiZulu. His knowledge of and choice to speak English with confidence is another demonstration of his linguistic capability.

Kabelo is familiar with symbols of both popular global culture exemplified by the Maponya shopping mall, digital artefacts and Steers burgers that juxtapose with local ‘kasi’ cultural practices exemplified by kwotas, home-based tavern business, local public swimming pool visits, taxi drives and Sesotho-speaking church-going. He demonstrates his cultural capability in the way he explains his cultural life to me and Koketso, the research translator.
Kabelo’s agency is further revealed in the way he takes responsibility to travel on his own, by taxi and the way his circumstances at his Dobsonville home allows him to play by himself, on his own.

His awareness of the political situation and his opinions about leading political figures in South Africa are testimony to his political capability.

Act 3: Joy at school

Kabelo finds joy in his school-going through his love for his teacher, his play with friends, the warm meals that he can eat during breaks, and school activities such as zoo visits. That Kabelo plays near the toilets on the periphery of the central playground is also reflective of his reticent role relative to children who are more vocal and visible on the central playground.

At school Kabelo plays games that demonstrate harmonious collaboration and turn-taking. Soccer is a collaborative team sport in which Kabelo defines his role as a goalkeeper. Goalkeepers play an important defensive role in preventing the other team from scoring. They are central to the success or failure of the team and occupy a specialised role in the game. The goalkeeper position also takes on the most responsibility in the game because of its role in preventing the opposing side from scoring (Fédération Internationale de Football Association, 2019; Realbuzz.com, 2018). In this respect too, Kabelo demonstrates his agency in the way he assumes a leading responsibility in the game.

The game that involves taking turns as the driver or the rider further reflects a sharing, collaborative, team-oriented capability and culture within Kabelo’s playground play at school.

Pretend-play

Kabelo reveals how he engages in pretend-play in two scenes. The one revealing his mimicry of scenes at school and the other a scene involves pretend-beating a police officer. These two scenes provide a window on the fantasy worlds and preoccupations of Kabelo.

The pretend-play about school highlights his perceptions of the authoritative role of the teacher in the classroom; his understanding of how instructional learning works; how discipline is maintained and importantly, the roles played by the children when they play school. The children are the ones who listen to the teacher, obey instructions and answers questions. In this play, Kabelo is the teacher but he is represented by the children. He demonstrates his understanding of this role in his storyboard about his school life. Here he says he listens to the teacher.

The scene involving puppet-beating is an example of shared pretence among the boys about an aggressive form of violence.

According to Bruner (1985), sharing an imaginary world with another person means that there is a shared understanding and feeling among them and that together and that they share an understanding of ‘possible worlds’. To share an imaginary world with another person, to cooperate with and contribute to a shared pretend narrative, requires an ability to understand what the other is thinking, feeling, and planning, a grasp of the “possible worlds” (Bruner, 1985) of the fantasy characters.

More specifically Kabelo reveals an anger towards a police officer which may be a reflection of a broader reaction against law enforcement or the lack thereof in Soweto.

These scenes demonstrate Kabelo’s social capability through his awareness, interpretation and sense-making of the social challenges associated with violence. It also reveals his knowledge and insights on his learning life and classroom life at school. In pretence children take up a role, an identity and activity.
They also reflect an aesthetic capability in the manner in which Lindqvist (1996) explains the aesthetics of children’s play and their use of fantasy and narrative.

Play and making

Kabelo’s world of play is filled with design, making and game-play through which he enacts a sense of duty, responsibility, and agency. His initiative to make sandwiches, prepare for school by himself in the mornings, wash his clothes and clean his grandfather’s car, are manifestations of responsible, serious play.

These scenes demonstrate the following play capabilities:

They show Kabelo’s capabilities as a designer and maker in naturalistic settings, proposed by Papert & Harel (1991). Their theory of constructionism suggests that learning programmes need to harness the deeper, multi-faceted ways in which children learn through designing, making, creating and building.

Kabelo demonstrates these capabilities in his naturalistic environment through his everyday practices at home coupled with a sense of duty and responsibility.

This also relates to the work of Thomas & Brown (2009) who highlight confluences in tacit knowing, making and playing as reflected in these scenes in Kabelo’s portrait.

Digital play

Digital artefacts are embedded and embodied in the Kabelo’s daily life and world of play. For Kabelo, they facilitate a sense of joy, self-making and enable learning. His production of selfies and posed-photos and video; his downloading of games and music; his claims to be learning how to drive, feeding his aspiration to become a truck and Maserati driver, are manifestations of Kabelo’s digital play. Together with his video recording of the funeral of Winnie Mandela and Thumma Mina video of Hugh Masekela, his access to and use of digital technologies reflect an embedded social, cultural and political consciousness. While his parents demonstrate an awareness of inherent risks associated with his digital play, this aspect of his world of play is generally muted.

These scenes show Kabelo’s agency in articulating what he does not like especially when he felt imposed upon by his mother’s interests. He was open about his preferences in playing digital games that he thought had both learning and entertainment value.

They demonstrate his digital capability to access information through searches, downloading relevant applications, recording television programmes that he found to be important and relevant for him. He also knows how to communicate via WhatsApp and understands that accessing digital tools require access to data.

It also reflects his creativity, design and making capability in the production of selfies that he enhances with patterns, frames and captions and his self-made videos about his daily life in Soweto.

A selfie is more than a static photograph taken of one’s self that is shared on social media. Selfies are taken in a social and cultural context. They are a form of visual communication that capture thoughts, intentions, emotions, desires and aesthetics. Facial expressions such as Kabelo’s pouts, body language through poses with peace signs and visual art elements are all captured within a selfie (Nemer & Freeman, 2015, p.1833).

For Kabelo producing selfies are about self-expression and self-making in the way Bruner, (1991) explains the notion of self-making. Writing from the perspective of autobiography as a literary genre, Bruner posits that it is “all in
the constructing”, in the making of the text or, in this case, the photograph or video (Bruner, 1991 p.27).

He says further that it is not just in the construction of the self but in the construction of a culture (Bruner op. cit p35). Kabelo’s selfies and videos are an act of self-expression, self-making, aspiration. They are about looking and feeling good. They communicate what he loves and who he is, to his friends, the adults in his life including the researchers. This takes place in the situated context of his playworld in Soweto. His talk about his selfie-taking provides some insight on the perceptions of the selfie-making culture from the perspective of a township boy.

**Violent play**

Exposure to violence is embedded in Kabelo’s playworld , acted out through beating up puppets whilst the adult eyes were averted and self-reporting on witnessing attacks on women in the home, at school and in the community. Kabelo also relates his experience as a victim of bullying at school.

Kabelo’s demonstrates his **problem-solving capabilities** by articulating his fear as a victim of bullying at school and the ways in which he tries to cope. His strategy to report bullying behaviour is an example of his agency and attempt at dealing with the situation even though his attempts are reportedly in vain. This capability is further reflected in his attempts at explaining the prevalence of violence and gambling as a social problem at school, at home and in the township. He shows his awareness of the problem as well as strategies to deal with them.

Kabelo demonstrates his ability to explain the causes of violence and bullying, an important step towards problem-solving, thereby demonstrating his **problem-solving** capability.

**Play and caring**

In his attempts to explain the causes of violence and bullying and provide solutions, Kabelo defines what it means to be a good boy and a gentleman and conforming to the ‘instructions’ of the country that perpetuate good behaviour for boys.

It reveals his **capabilities for care of others and self-care** and his ability to distinguish right from wrong. His reference to how a gentleman needs to wear his clothes, reflects his association with self-care and dignified presentation and representation.

They also reveal a **capability of imagination and aspiration** for a better society, a better South Africa. Appadurai, 2004 was vocal about the need for scholarly attention to the imagination, ideas and aspiration in influencing cultural practices. He coined this a ‘capacity to aspire’ which is prevalent in Kabelo’s everyday play.

**Cognitive deficits**

Kabelo’s struggles with reading In English and Sesotho make him sad but he endures this sadness. He feels seen and understood by the adults in relation to his reading struggles, particularly his mother, his teachers, and the researchers. His difficulties with his eyes appear not to be followed through.

The way he manages his reading struggles through memorising his readers making it possible for him to identify complex words like ‘elephant’ juxtaposes with the way he demonstrated his challenges in the English First Additional Language lesson and reading an age-and-culturally-inappropriate, Disney-Disneyfied book about an animal he did not know and about a character whose famous name he did not know either. Here he talks openly about his difficulty with phonics, how it makes him feel,
despite his exposure to literature in his home.

The scene about repeating Grade 1 is another reflection of underperformance and the ways that the boys, in this case Kabelo’s friend, responded to repeating a grade. Kabelo and his friend express their experience with being considered poor performing boys because they repeated Grade 1. Being teased by children in their class who were advancing to higher grades and being teased by adult workers at the school, show the emotions that they have to navigate and the resilience with which they do so. Kabelo’s performance story reached its height when his parents were advised that his assessment revealed the need for him to move to an LSEN school.

These scenes show an awareness by Kabelo’s teacher and school psychologist of the limited capabilities at the school to help address Kabelo’s academic needs. At the same time the nature of their assessment of his performance, also reveals limitations of the assessment process in making an adequate assessment of his cognitive capabilities. At the same time his academic world of performance and assessment do not acknowledge his world of play and his capabilities that he possesses. The second assessment categorised him as being severely cognitively challenged. He was diagnosed as a learner with learning disabilities and therefore as one with special educational needs. A glaring aspect of Kabelo’s underperformance experience is that the decision to send him to another school was premised on an assessment that was conducted in English and not in his home language, Sesotho. He would have been limited in communicating if he was only required to respond in English. Moreover, one of the assessment instruments also appeared to be inappropriate, thereby revealing shortcomings with the assessment process.

Kabelo’s assessment depicted a severe form of cognitive challenge whereas assessments at schools for severely cognitively challenged children indicated that he was ‘more advanced’ and would not fit into their schools. In the end, the choice was made by his mother as to the school that she thought would be most suitable.

The scenes from this act also reveal Kabelo’s openness about his reading challenges and how it made him feel. His transparency about his feelings demonstrate a capability to be vulnerable and talking about it struck me. He spoke openly about feeling bad, showing a picture of a crying child and telling me that it makes him sad that he cannot read. He also spoke about his reading challenge with a sense of agency and not from a deficit perspective. He offered suggestions about how to address his reading challenges which is also evidence of his problem-solving approach.

That he chose to memorise an entire book and then read it out in school is one of his coping strategies which reflects his motivation and determination to improve his academic performance.

**Recognition and resolution**

Despite his mother’s anxiety about being at an LSEN school, Kabelo reveals that he is happy at his new school. He loves his teacher and his principal who are both male. He feels seen by them. He has made new friends and he says that he is learning to read better. These scenes suggest that in the world of academic performance, Kabelo feels more visible at his LSEN school. His stories suggest that he feels settled and happy and he has made new friends with whom he plays during breaks. He receives individual attention because he is in a smaller class.

His mother also reinforces the view that he is happy at the new school and feels resolved.
6.1 Introduction: Kabelo’s portrait as two interacting activity systems

In this chapter, I apply activity system analysis (ASA) based on Engeström’s (2015; 2006; 1999) cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) methodology. My use of ASA is consistent with the purpose of this research project which is to render more visible and audible the everyday world of play of a purposeful sample of reading-challenged township boys and its interaction with their world of academic performance. I explained how I chose to explore in depth, the playworld and academic performance of one of boy pseudo-named Kabelo. The application of ASA synchronises with the social justice theoretical orientation of this study, its adoption of standpoint epistemology, and its application of a hybrid of critical ethnography, narrative inquiry and portraiture.

The thesis proposes that the township boychild’s everyday experience is predominantly a play experience. For him, play is his way of being and his world is predominantly a playworld. The boychild’s everyday play and play capabilities should, therefore, be considered an important register and mode of self-making that warrants socially-just recognition within the formal education system. Based on activity systems analysis (ASA) (Engeström, ibid), Kabelo’s playworld is analysed as one activity system that interacts with his world of academic performance as another activity system. The thesis illuminates this interaction as a combination of similarity and dialectical contradictions within and between these two interacting activity systems. It argues, however, that the dialectical contradictions manifest as moments of systemic misrecognition that require specific illumination as analytically distinct forms of inequality. On the basis of this analysis it proposes that expansive

Although there has been revisions of these phenomena, I regard them as functional ways with which to see juxtapositions and disaggregations in social systems.
transformation within and between both worlds as two interacting activity systems can be operationalised through the socially-just recognition of his play capabilities as his funds of knowledge.

6.2 Similarities and dialectical contradictions

Kabelo’s portrait is a narrative about the dialectical and complex relationship between his different worlds in which play and academic performance occupy significant presence. Understanding how these two activity systems intersect, combine and collide is essential to understanding the relationship between Kabelo’s system of everyday knowledge as everyday play compared to formal schooled knowledge and performance. Figure 6.1 provides a diagrammatic representation of two interacting systems, derived from Engeström (2006).

![Figure 6.1. The structure of two interacting activity systems (Engeström, 2006, p3)](image)

Figure 6.1 shows that these two systems are intertwined within the lifeworld of the subject. Viewing Kabelo’s portrait as two interacting systems is also inspired by Vossoughi & Gutiérrez (2014) thus:

Understanding people as part of multiple activity systems, and, ... attending to the relation between everyday and school-based expertise, can help problematize common dichotomies of home/school, formal/informal,
academic/everyday (Gutiérrez & Larson, 2007; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003), and enable us to discern what takes hold as people and practices move across time and space (Gutiérrez, 2008; Street, 2005) Vossoughi & Gutiérrez (2014, p.604).

Being able to discern what takes hold within, between and beyond time, space, contexts, tools and people from a systems perspective is what ASA provides through the application of an activity “gaze” (Van Oers et al., 2008). As two interacting systems, they reflect some similarities, but the contradictions within and between them are also endemic.

6.2.1 Similarities between two activity systems

There are nodes within both activity systems that are shared and similar. These include Kabelo’s communities and the formal rules that govern both play and academic performance.

**Shared community: parents, friends, relatives and teacher**

In both the Kabelo’s playworld and performance world, the members of his community are his parents, relatives, friends and teachers, who share the object of meaning-making as well as shared experiences with progression through the school system respectively. In his playworld, his friends at school share his experience with exposure to violence and bullying. These influenced and characterised their dark play which takes place at school, at home and in their respective communities. The value and quality of friendships as a protective factor in the face of bullies is evident when Kabelo met with me as part of a focus group that included his friends. The experience of and exposure to bullying and domestic violence were raised as a concern for all of them. His storyboard about life at school shows the importance of the social aspects of schooling for Kabelo, enacted through his friendships. Moreover, in his playworld, his mother and grandparents demonstrate care and support for Kabelo’s everyday play. In fact, in some cases, Kabelo’s mother is also his playmate with whom he tries out TV recipes. His mother observes and acknowledges his pretend-play.

In Kabelo’s academic performance activity system, the members of his community include his friends with whom he shares the experience of repeating
Grade 1 and who talk about their shared experience of failure and underperformance. Kabelo also feels that his mother, his teachers at both schools and his principals are aware of his reading struggles and they provide understanding, support and care. Moreover, that he has a teacher who speaks Sesotho as her mother tongue and that he is in a predominantly Sesotho-speaking class with classmates who all speak Sesotho and additional African languages serve as his ‘speech community’ (Gumperz, 1968) that provide agential support for Kabelo. The speech community is a reference to regular interaction among a community through a shared body of verbal signs (Gumperz, 1968, p66). Kabelo’s speech community is also shared on the playground with his friends from other classrooms with whom he engages in different African languages including Sesotho and ‘kasi taal’.

At his new LSEN school, Kabelo reportedly received support from an occupational therapist and speech therapist. He was placed in a smaller class and made new friends. A few months into his placement, he talks about his love for his new school, new friends and his male teacher and male principal. He feels supported and noticed at his new school. While the study has not explored Kabelo’s performance at the LSEN school, it appears that his experience is consistent with the findings by Pillay and Terlizzi (2009) of their study of one learner who thrived after he transitioned from a mainstream to an LSEN school.

**Shared formal rules**

The two systems are also governed by the same formal rules. The formal national and international policies, laws and regulations that govern the playworld system, also govern the academic performance system. For example, national and international policies on play also fall within the ambit of South Africa’s policies on curriculum and assessment, digital learning and inclusive education. All of these policies are underpinned by a constitutional commitment to children’s rights including their right to education and their right to play and access to play resources.

**Similarities as moments of recognition**

These similarities between the community and formal rules in both activity systems serve as moments of recognition and forms of visibility and acknowledgement of the subject. The recognition is manifest in his community when Kabelo says: ‘my mudder knows, and my teacher knows and my principal’, when he
speaks about his struggles with reading at his new school. He says the same of his former teacher at Joy of Learning Primary School, with whom he felt comfortable, supported and understood. He feels seen and visible to his teacher with whom he resonates culturally and linguistically. He feels included in his speech community, among his peers, especially those with whom he shares the label as an underperforming learner. In these examples shared language is also illuminated as a source of recognition when Kabelo engages with his friends and peers, his speech community.

It could also be argued that the acknowledgement by his former school-based support team that the school lacks resources to support Kabelo’s progression through the school system, may also be considered a form of recognition and support. However, alongside these moments of recognition, endemic dialectical contradictions within and between the two activity systems are also analytically distinct. I discuss the contradictions as they manifest between the two activity systems next.

6.2.2 Contradictions between two activity systems

At the level of the subject, tools, object and outcomes, there are contradiction between the two systems when compared with one another as two interacting systems.

Contradiction 1: Playful and capable child vs cognitively-challenged national learner

Kabelo as the subject is the centre of both activity systems. In his playworld, Kabelo as subject is a playful child that can exercise his agency, choices and capabilities. He can travel by taxi in Soweto on his own, engage his mother on mobile learning apps that he dislikes; make his sandwiches and self-manage his morning routine to school. He is also an aspirant child with an imagination about a desired future. He wants to be a truck driver, a fast car owner, an engineer and he aspires to go to the university in Soweto. This resonates with Zipin, Sellar, Brennan and Gale, (2015) who show how aspirations emerge via a range of socio-cultural influences and resources including family, community histories and populist ideologies. Kabelo’s aspirations are sourced from his family’s aspirations for him, his linguistic and cultural communities offered by his church-going and religious activities, and his exposure to
the possibility of career success. The latter is exemplified by his paternal aunt who is a top human resources executive in a leading airline company; political and corporate leaders from his township; and his favourite Soweto musical artists who have made it to fame. Moreover, Kabelo shows how he is a modern African urban child, born in a complex globalising, digital age by the way he consumes a range of both global and local artefacts.

In his performance world, Kabelo is a ‘national learner’ who is severely cognitively-challenged; a boy with a learning disability, classified as a learner with special educational needs (LSEN). He is an under-performing learner, based on his challenges with reading and writing in Sesotho as his ‘home language’ and English as a ‘first additional’ (second) language, reflected in his poor test scores. That he experiences difficulties with reading in English and Sesotho became evident in the fieldwork of this study. He is also framed as a ‘progressed learner’ who had already repeated the Grade 1 year and could not repeat another grade in the foundation phase. As a result, he ‘progressed’ toward Grade 3 before he moved to a school for learners with special educational needs with a different grading system. He is able to identify his ‘struggles with reading’ in English and Sesotho, which he explains as a problem with his eyes; he talks about his frustration and sadness that his reading challenges cause him, and his plans to overcome them.

Kabelo’s articulation of his sadness and frustration resonate with a growing knowledge corpus on the learner perspective in literacy and language learning that highlight the emotional aspects of literacy learning (Busch et al., 2016) and provide first-person accounts of language learning.

Thus, there are two conflicting depictions of the subject in each activity system. He is a capable, playful child with agency which contrasts with a deficit depiction of him as an underperforming learner.

**Contradiction 2: Multilingualism versus monolingualised boundaries as cultural tool**

Across the vastness of Soweto as a playground is a melting pot of local African languages that combine with the languages of modernity via globalisation and digitisation. Kabelo is exposed to, speaks and understands more than one African language including Sesotho, Setswana, Isizulu and Siswati. At his LSEN school, he
is further exposed to Afrikaans with his Afrikaans-speaking classmates, which he did not experience at his former school. With me as researcher, Kabelo would communicate in English often despite the presence of a Sesotho translator. With his friends and peers, they talk of *mpalma klap*, *zwebi* and loving *kwotas* as reflections of *kasi taal*. He also talks of ‘googling’ when he does his homework and sending *WhatsApps* when he has *data*. In these ways, Kabelo’s portrait reveals that he has a few languages in his fluid linguistic repertoire (Busch, 2010) and that he is a multilingual subject who communicates and understands a range of African languages, English, ‘kasi taal’, the encroaching language that accompanies cultural globalisation, and his recent exposure to Afrikaans at his new school. He moves within and between the formal and informal language practices which is consistent with translanguaging referred to by Makalela (2014).

Thus, Kabelo’s play-world is mediated by a mix of languages, cultural tools, narrative resources, images and artefacts and operate in multimodal, multilingual and multi-sourced semiotic domains. The influence of signs, values and commitments from global and local cultures, via his digital footprint, toys, digital play, pretend-play and game-play are pervasive in his playworld. This contrasts with his world of academic performance where the tools and signs are those that are used to mediate academic learning and achievement. From the academic performance system’s perspective, Kabelo learns English as a second language and Sesotho as his home language as ‘bounded’, monolingualised (Busch, 2010) languages. His multilingualism takes a back seat and his performance in reading is based on literacy and language teaching as prescribed in the curriculum. In this way, the incongruencies in linguistic practice between the two systems of the boychild, are evident.

**Contradiction 3: Appropriate school readers vs age-inappropriate home readers**

Kabelo’s portrait further shows that he was *not challenged* with a lack of access to reading instruction resources. His classroom is media-rich, with word-walls in English and Sesotho; a clearly defined reading corner; and a range of readers on display. He reportedly brought home a reader every day, and there is evidence of a family-literate environment where he is exposed to bible-reading, reading of novels
and newspapers. His mother also engages him in regular talk and vice versa. This is contrary to Zimmerman & Howie's (2016) findings from their study of six schools where they used international reading benchmarks from the Progress in Reading and Literacy Study (2006) to depict reading performance levels. They found that learners from low-performing schools did not have adequate access to reading instruction resources.

One of Kabelo’s strategies to manage his reading struggles is to memorise his reader at home so that he can read them to his teacher at school. That he can memorise his reader to recite it out loud the next day in class, reflects his ability and motivation to learn to read and overcome the difficulties that he encounters. It reveals a proficiency in memorisation, his preparedness to take charge of his struggles and his aspiration to be a child who can read. This combines with his mixed messages about liking to read and disliking reading even though he is exposed to the adults in his homes as readers of newspapers, the bible and novels.

However, Kabelo’s portrait also raises questions about the cultural and age appropriateness of some of the reading materials at home such as his book on Pooh and the complex language in the bible app on his tablet which, he and his mother claim, he reads every Friday for 20 minutes. Yet he confesses that he does not understand the voice over nor the difficult text. Thus, despite his access to media and literacy richness at school and at home, his access to appropriate readers, he cannot read the materials that he has access to at home because they are culturally and age-inappropriate. The latter is reinforced due to the lack of guidance to his parents about reading appropriate texts to support his literacy development in the home. These incongruencies manifest as dialectical contradictions in reading materials at school versus at home. Figure 6.2 provides a diagrammatic representation of the dialectical contradictions between the two activity systems, between tools and between subjects.
Contradiction 4. **Contradictory objects: self-making versus progression through performance**

The object under transformation in Kabelo’s playworld is his meaning-making and stylised self-making. I interpret Kabelo’s stylised self-making as that of an urban multilingual digitally-exposed boy within a bustling Soweto that is integral to the twenty-first-century Johannesburg. Through a complex blend of interactions with local and modern global cultural consumption, Kabelo’s *Afropolitanism* combines stable, routine family and church-going life with consumption of global and local commodities and a precarious and vulnerable exposure to poverty, crime and gender-based violence in his home and community. Kabelo demonstrates the construction of his culture, his world through his ‘selfies’ and digital photos and videos as acts of self-expression, self-making and aspiration.

Kabelo’s meaning-making and stylised self-making in his playworld, stand in contrast with the object of his academic performance world which is to demonstrate that relevant grade-appropriate proficiencies have been acquired in order to progress towards higher grades. Based on the curriculum and assessment system, Kabelo’s
progression through the system was challenged by his underperformance, particularly in reading and literacy which eventually led him to be labelled as an underperforming, severely-cognitively-challenged learner that was eventually sent to an LSEN school. Thus, his meaning-making and self-making as object contrasts with his underperformance in his progression through the mainstream schooling system.

Contradiction 5: Outcomes: play capabilities vs learning disabilities

A further, related contradiction is manifest between the conflicting outcomes between the two activity systems. The playworld system highlights Kabelo's play capabilities as outcome, whereas relevant academic skills and proficiencies are critical outcomes in the academic performance system. However, the latter reflects Kabelo’s learning disabilities instead, thereby juxtaposing his disabilities in the one system versus his everyday play capabilities in the other.

Thus, five dialectical contradictions are manifest between the two interacting activity systems. Next, I examine contradictions within each activity system.

6.2.3 Contradictions within each activity system

This section discusses contradictions within Kabelo’s academic performance activity system and then within his playworld activity system.

Contradiction 6: Between subject and tool and signs in academic performance

One of the more conspicuous manifestations of contradictions in his academic performance activity system is between Kabelo as subject and the performance assessment tools. The latter serves as a means to diagnose the learner’s abilities and provide a basis for the learner’s progression through the system. In addition, learners also undergo neuro-psychological assessments when learning difficulties are identified. During his foundation phase schooling years, from Grade R till the end of Grade 2, Kabelo experienced two psycho-educational assessments at the one school and one at each of four prospective LSEN schools before he was finally placed.
However, the neuropsychological assessment tools that led to his departure from his first school, appear to have limitations that may be cause for concern. For example, the Rey Auditory-Verbal Learning Test (RAVLT) appears to be an age-inappropriate assessment for a nine-year-old boy because it is an instrument designed for those who are 16 years and older. The instrument is available in English and it is not available in any of the African languages that Kabelo speaks and understands. The instrument was also designed in and for a Euro-American context, which highlights its cultural limitations for a Soweto boy. The technical, linguistic and cultural inappropriateness of the assessment tool challenges the validity of its results that concluded with diagnoses on the severity of the subject’s cognitive deficits.

These questionable psycho-educational assessment results carried considerable weight in justifying the need for Kabelo to enrol in an LSEN school.

**Contradiction 7: Between subject and reading materials as tool in academic performance**

Another evident tension prevails between Kabelo’s access and use of age, linguistic and culturally inappropriate reading materials at home. Kabelo and his mother demonstrate his ownership of children’s books with pride. However, his lack of awareness of the characters in the book suggests that he had not read them, partly because he was not able to. He demonstrated a similar experience with the bible app on his tablet whose voice-over he could not understand. The age, linguistic and cultural inappropriateness of these reading materials risks the alienation of Kabelo from his ability to become literate. Here too the tension is reflected in what his mother thinks is suitable for Kabelo’s literacy learning and his experience of dislike and lack of comprehension when engaging with these materials. In these ways, Kabelo’s alienation translates as experiences of misrecognition. Not seeing his perspective, and the way he articulates his dislikes and his struggles reinforce his lack of agency and voice, thereby reflecting an injustice.

**Contradiction 8: Between subject and rules in both systems**

In both systems, there are evident tensions between the subject and national policy. In his playworld activity system, policies on play are limited to policy on children’s right to play and play infrastructure, and play as joyful play. The playful
child and his broader repertoire of play practices and capabilities are not (yet) present in existing policy.

In the academic performance system, the subject is depicted in education policy in neutral homogenised terms such as being a national learner which obscures the differences between children. In CAPS, the subject is depicted to foster critical thinking but in related policies on school governance, the subject as a primary school-going child, does not have representation independent of their parents and teachers, at the primary school level. Furthermore, the child as subject displays multilingual, translanguaging practice when language policy in education is focused on monolinguised language. In these ways, Kabelo’s portrait reinforces findings in the literature that the child’s agency and lived experience is curtailed in policy.

Figure 6.3. Further dialectical contradictions within and between two systems

6.3 Critical conflicts as manifestations of misrecognition

Applying Engeström & Sannino (2011) model of contradictions, it is evident that the linguistic cues for each of the eight contradictions reflect personal, emotional, moral accounts, narrative structure and vivid metaphors. The features of these contradictions also reflect contradictory motives in social interaction. These features suggest that they all eight of them qualify as critical conflicts in the Engeström &
Sannino (2011, p375) model. This array of inter-related contradictions within and between the two systems, suggests that they operate as two conflicting systems in the life of the child. The one operates in a formal official domain above-ground, while the playworld system operates as a subterranean system, hidden underneath. By virtue of the playworld activity system operating in the domain of informality, the knowledges and capabilities reflected as outcomes would also lack legitimacy and recognition in the formal academic performance system. This lack of legitimacy operates as moments of misrecognition of the child’s capabilities, voice and agency.

Misrecognition assumes the form of inappropriate assessment instruments used for neuropsychological assessment as well as the alienating effects of complex and inappropriate reading materials that he is encouraged to read at home. Evidence from the literature suggest that appropriate support to develop literacy skills through play in the home can produce positive literacy effects (Saracho & Spodek, 2006) and that there are positive correlations with the use of mobile applications by children and literacy development (Neumann, 2016). However, few highlight the effects with literacy materials in the home that may be difficult, complex and alienating.

While Kabelo displayed his struggles with reading in class and at home when reading age-and-culturally-inappropriate materials, and while it appears that Kabelo and his parents were happy with the support and friendships at the LSEN school, these moments of misrecognition of the subject in the assessment process as forms of linguistic and cultural injustice, warrants illumination. The unfairness and misrecognition lay in the disadvantage that the assessment instrument placed him; the consequent deficit depiction of him, and the implications that a deficit-depiction holds for the child and his community about their respective self-concept. While some of the literature questions the relevance and validity of neuropsychological assessments in schools, few analyse the consequences of their use for the self-concept of child and his community. Reay & Wiliam (1999) in their study of 20 below-average-performing primary school children in South London in 1998 and their view of tests, found that the children's perceptions of the tests contribute to their understandings of themselves as learners. Kabelo’s articulations of how bad and sad he feels about being framed as the child who struggles with reading, is evident in his portrait.
Misrecognition also assumes the form of discrepancies in the value that Kabelo’s play capabilities are afforded relative to the value that society attributes to academic performance. Lave’s (1988) work on cognition in practice also makes this point. Kabelo’s everyday playworld knowledge and play capabilities are analysed as being integral to his funds of knowledge. Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez's (1992, p133) conceptualisation of funds of knowledge includes the selection of the use-value of this knowledge. This use-value is determined by the way the child uses knowledge, and in this case, his play capabilities, under given conditions, circumstances and changes. González, Moll, & Amanti, (2005) have also shown further that children’s funds of knowledge serve as rich knowledge reservoirs that can support their classroom learning. However, because their use-value lack legitimacy, they are not recognised in formal schooled knowledge spaces. Academic performance is premised on gaining skills and proficiencies in exchange for progression through the system and eventual absorption into the labour market. In this way, from a labour market perspective, the schooled knowledge carries exchange value which gives it, its legitimacy.

To address the moments of misrecognition in the formal academic performance world, the thesis proposes a way in which activity system transformation can be operationalised.

6.4 Towards the socially-just recognition of children’s play capabilities

I have proposed that the township boychild’s everyday lived experience (Van Manen, 2015) is predominantly lived play experience, with play as his way of being. I have also contended that his everyday world is predominantly a playworld. Hence his everyday play and play capabilities should be considered an important register and mode of self-making that warrants socially-just recognition within the formal education system. I argue that such socially-just recognition can be operationalised through the acknowledgement and recognition of the child’s play capabilities as being integral to his funds of knowledge. Such operationalisation can enable activity system transformation and expansion within and between his playworld and academic performance world.
6.4.1 Operationalising activity system transformation and expansion

For Engeström (2015), contradictions are sources for change and expansive transformation, usually over a sustained period. Fundamental shifts that catalyse system transformation occurs when the object of the human activity embraces a broader horizon. Engeström (1999) summarises this transformation process thus:

...transformations proceed through stepwise cycles of expansive learning which begin with actions of questioning the existing standard practice, then proceed to actions of analysing its contradictions and modelling a vision for its zone of proximal development, then to actions of examining and implementing the new model in practice. Engeström (1999, p.960)

Based on the analysis of the eight contradictions as manifestations of critical contradictions and as moments of misrecognition, Engeström & Sannino (2011) propose that the resolution of critical contradictions would involve finding a new personal sense and negotiating a new meaning (2011, p. 375). In response to the latter, I propose that transformation within and between the two activity systems can be operationalised by enabling the socially-just recognition of the township boy-child’s play capabilities. Here the thesis proposes to build on the experience of developing lists of core capabilities as shown by Nussbaum’s (2000) list of core human capabilities; Robeyns’, (2003) list for the evaluation of gender inequality; and more specifically, Biggeri et al (2011) and Walker (2006) on children’s capabilities and capabilities for education respectively. Biggeri et al. (2011) and Walker (2006) developed their lists in collaboration with children and the former provide a process by which children participate in their choice and design of valued capabilities. Their approach is consistent with the view that children have agency and should be given the freedom of choice. These lists are attempts at operationalising the capabilities approach by valuing, evaluating and measuring human capabilities for well-being (Nussbaum, 2000), for child well-being (Biggeri et al.) and in education (Walker, 2006; Wilson Strydom 2016).

To the domains related to children’s play, I draw from Kabelo’s portrait for preliminary consideration, an initial list of children’s play capabilities beyond the right to play as outlined in Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). These can fall within play in Nussbaum’s (ibid) list and in some
domains mainly related to education in Biggeri and Mehrotra’s (ibid) and Walker’s (ibid) lists. These identified capabilities are integral to Kabelo’s ‘funds of knowledge’ (González et al., 2005) and ‘dark funds of knowledge’ (Zipin, 2009). Such a preliminary list is available as Table 6.1(a-e). It makes comparisons with Nussbaum’s (2000) original list of 10 central human functional capabilities, with Walker’s (2006) catalogue on gender equity in education based on her engagement with 40 girls in South African high schools. It also includes a children’s capabilities list developed by Biggeri and Mehrotra (2011) in their attempt to define, evaluate and measure capabilities for children’s well-being. The purpose of this comparison is to locate the play capabilities that arose in Kabelo’s portrait that can potentially contribute towards a more substantive ideal-theoretical list of children’s play capabilities.

Table 6.1a. Kabelo’s play capabilities compared with capabilities lists: play

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<td>Central human functional</td>
<td>Gender equity in education</td>
<td>Preliminary list of capabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>capabilities</td>
<td>– voices of girls</td>
<td>relevant for children – voices of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>children</td>
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**Other Species.** Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature

**Play** to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

**Control over one’s environment.** Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.

**Voice, for participation in learning,** for speaking out, not being silenced through pedagogy or power relations or harassment, or excluded from curriculum, being active in the acquisition of knowledge

**Shelter and environment:** being able to be sheltered and to live in a healthy, safe and pleasant environment

**Mobility:** Being able to move

**Kabelo’s portrait** revealed that he has is able to be sheltered and live in a healthy safe and pleasant environment. He is able to move and have limited voice for participation in learning. He also has **capabilities to play** in the way described by Nussbaum (2000) and he is able to engage in leisure activities.

Table 6.1a shows how Kabelo’s portrait reveals the capabilities similar to that identified by Nussbaum (ibid), Walker (ibid) and Biggeri and Mehrotra (ibid) with reference to play, environment, leisure, shelter and participation. However, the lists supplied by these authors have a limited focus on play. With this in mind, I elaborate on play capabilities revealed in Kabelo’s playworld, in comparison to the other capabilities identified by all three authors. These play capabilities can contribute towards the further development of play as a subset of existing capabilities lists.
Table 6.1b highlights Kabelo’s capabilities for life, bodily health and bodily integrity. In comparison, it shows that he demonstrates capabilities for emotional integrity, love and care. These capabilities related to care, self-care, care for others and love, intersect with other capabilities identified by the four authors.

Table 6.1b. Kabelo’s play capabilities compared with capabilities lists: love and care

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<tr>
<td>Central human functional capabilities</td>
<td>Gender equity in education – voices of girls</td>
<td>Preliminary list of capabilities relevant for children – voices of children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotions: To have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one’s emotional development blighted by overwhelming fear and anxiety, or by traumatic events of abuse or neglect. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.).</td>
<td>Emotional integrity and emotions: To fear which diminishes learning, either from physical punishment or verbal attacks, developing emotions and imagination for understanding, empathy, awareness and discernment.</td>
<td>Mental well-being: To be mentally healthy.</td>
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<td>Love and care: To love and being loved by those who care and being able to be protected.</td>
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Kabelo’s playworld reveals that he has **capabilities for care of others and self-care**. His reference to how a gentleman needs to wear his clothes, reflects his association with self-care and dignified presentation and representation.

Table 6.1c compares Kabelo’s capabilities with those related to life, physical bodily health and bodily integrity. His capability for self-care fits into their lists as shown.
Table 6.1c. Kabelo’s play capabilities compared with capabilities list: life and bodily health

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<td><strong>Life:</strong> To live to the end of human life; dying prematurely, or before one’s life is so reduced as to be not worth living.</td>
<td><strong>Autonomy:</strong> To have choices, information to make choices, planning a life after school, reflection, independence, empowerment.</td>
<td><strong>Life and physical health:</strong> To be born, be physically healthy and enjoy a life of normal length</td>
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<td><strong>Bodily health:</strong> To have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.</td>
<td><strong>Bodily integrity and bodily health:</strong> Not to be subjected to any form of harassment at school by peers or teachers, being safe at school, making own choices about sexual relationships, be free from sexually transmitted diseases, being involved in sporting activities.</td>
<td><strong>Bodily integrity and safety:</strong> To be protected from the violence of any sort</td>
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<td><strong>Bodily integrity:</strong> To move freely from place to place; having one’s bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e. being able to be secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.</td>
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Kabelo’s playworld revealed that he has the capability for life, physical, bodily health and bodily integrity. While exposed to violence he also displays capability to navigate the challenges that are associated with exposure to violence through the building social networks with friends who share the same challenges. In his playworld, these manifests as the capability for **self-care and care for others**, evident in his reference to the ways of being a gentleman.

Kabelo’s portrait reveals his capabilities social, problem-solving, geographic and navigational capabilities. They also demonstrate his multi-lingual and digital capabilities which form part of his playworld and which are not made explicit in the lists supplied by the four authors, as shown in Table 6.1d.
Table 6.1d. Kabelo’s play capabilities compared with capabilities lists: imagination & knowledge

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Central human functional capabilities</td>
<td>Gender equity in education – voices of girls</td>
<td>Preliminary list of capabilities relevant for children – voices of children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senses Imagination &amp; Thought:</td>
<td>To use the senses, to imagine, to think, to reason. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing self expressive works and events of one’s own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one’s mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to search for the ultimate meaning of life in one’s own way. Being able to have pleasurable experiences, and to avoid non-necessary pain.</td>
<td>Knowledge: To have knowledge of school subjects which are intrinsically interesting or instrumentally useful for post-school choices of study, paid work and a career, girls’ access to all school subjects, access to powerful analytical knowledge, including knowledge of girls’ and women’s lives, knowledge for critical thinking and for debating complex moral and social issues, knowledge from involvement in intrinsically interesting school societies, active inquiry, transformation of understanding, fair assessment/examination of knowledge gained</td>
<td>Education: To be educated</td>
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Kabelo’s playworld revealed his capability to use his senses, to imagine, reason and think. Social capability through his awareness, interpretation and sense-making of the social challenges associated with violence. His use of imagination in his pretend-play and his aspiration to become a truck driver and engineer was also evident. He revealed his knowledge for critical thinking and debating complex moral and social issues. He also demonstrated his capability to be educated, to aspire and be motivated to learn and succeed. His playworld also revealed his problem-solving capabilities by articulating his fear as a victim of bullying at school and the ways in which he tries to cope with bullying in his classroom environment. He further demonstrated his capabilities as a designer and maker in the production of selfies that he enhances with patterns, frames and captions and his self-made videos about his daily life in Soweto.

Moreover, Kabelo reflected his geographical and navigational capability: This was evident from his spatial awareness contrasted with the knowledge of the computerised geo-positional system (GPS). He also has multi-lingual capability: That Kabelo’s situated social practices are multi-lingual as reflected in his ability to speak his dominant home language, seSotho, combined with his ability to understand and communicate in Setswana and isiZulu and he speaks and understands English with confidence when engaging the researcher. Kasi-taal also features in his multi-linguistic repertoire.

Kabelo also demonstrated the degree to which he has digital capability to engage in multi-modal digital literacies; to access information through searches, downloading relevant applications, recording television programmes that he found to be important and relevant for him; and creating selfies.

Kabelo also reveals his collaborative, cultural and political capabilities which adds to the existing lists related to respect, practical reason and affiliation.
| Nussbaum (2000, pp.78-80)  
Gender equity in education – voices of girls | Biggeri & Mehrotra (2011, p.51)  
Preliminary list of capabilities relevant for children – voices of children |
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<td><strong>Practical reason:</strong> To have a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.</td>
<td><strong>Respect and recognition, self-confidence and self-esteem,</strong> To have respect for and receive respect from others, being treated with dignity, not being diminished or devalued because of one’s gender, social class, religion or race, valuing other languages, other religions and spiritual practice and human diversity, showing imaginative empathy, compassion, fairness and generosity, listing to and considering other persons’ points of view in dialogue and debate in and out of class in school, being able to act inclusively.</td>
<td><strong>Respect:</strong> To be respected and treated with dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affiliation:</strong> To live with and toward others, to recognise and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for that situation; to have the capability for both justice and friendship. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails, at a minimum, protection against discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, caste, ethnicity, or national origin. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.</td>
<td><strong>Social relations:</strong> To have the capability to be a friend, the capability to participate in a group for friendship and for learning, to be able to work with others to solve problems and tasks, being able to work with others to form effective or good groups for learning and organizing life at school, being able to respond to human need, social belonging.</td>
<td><strong>Social relations:</strong> To be part of social networks and to give and receive social support*</td>
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<td><strong>Participation:</strong> To participate in and have a fair share of influence and being able to receive objective information*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation:</strong> To be protected from economic and non-economic exploitation*</td>
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Kabelo’s playworld reveals the centrality of his family’s religious affiliations to his everyday lived experience including its accompanying social relations. He also demonstrates his **collaborative capability:** Kabelo plays games that demonstrate harmonious collaboration and turn-taking. Soccer is a collaborative team sport in which Kabelo defines his role as a goalkeeper. He also demonstrated his **cultural capability:** Kabelo is familiar with symbols of popular global culture, juxtaposed with local ‘kasi’ cultural practices. Moreover, Kabelo reflects his **political capability:** His awareness of the political situation and his opinion about leading political figures in South Africa are a testimony to his political knowledge and his ability to think critically.
I offer these initial play capabilities as revealed in Kabelo’s playworld, as part of a preliminary list of core play capabilities for children that can help to operationalise their recognition in the formal education system. It will require further development in ways that take account of the processes and procedures suggested by Robeyns (2003).

6.5 Research conclusions

This study set out to respond to its primary research question: who is the ‘reading-challenged boy’ beneath his literacy scores. Further, it asked how he experiences his academic under-performance and how his academic underperformance compares and contrasts with his everyday world of play, including his digital play.

The study concludes, drawing on empirical knowledge of others such as Bessant (2014) and Ballet, Biggeri and Comim (2011), that the township boychild is capable aspirant and has agency and voice, within his situated, mercurial, structurally-unequal, post-apartheid, and increasingly digital worlds. The peculiarities of Soweto as a ‘township’, its cultural-historical and political evolution and heritage gives a particular character to the ‘urban township-ness’ of Kabelo as the boychild research participant. In his playworld activity system, Kabelo’s portrait revealed that his play assumes a variety of forms. These include joyful gameplay, digital play, pretend-play, creative constructionist play. It also included violent play or dark play. The study, therefore, expands the conceptualisation of play through the lens of the child’s everyday experience. The range of play capabilities revealed in Kabelo’s portrait is what makes his everyday play come alive. In critical support of attempts at a ‘universal’ list of core human capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000) and similar initiatives in education by Walker (2006), the study offers an initial list of the child’s play capabilities as exemplified in Kabelo everyday life. It further proposes that his play capabilities are integral to his funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005). On this basis, my central argument grounded in data, is for the systemic, socially-just recognition of Kabelo’s play capabilities. However, the study also concludes that Kabelo as agential play-capable subject is misrecognised in current policy and practice of play, children’s rights and early childhood development in South Africa. The latter places emphasis on a conceptualisation of play as being predominantly fun and joyful (Zosh et al., 2017), and on children’s right to play and their right to access
play infrastructures. Juxtaposed with his academic performance activity system, his play capabilities are further misrecognised based on their emergence from his under-valued everyday knowledge.

I further conclude that in his academic performance activity system, Kabelo is depicted as cognitively-challenged, learner with special educational needs based on a battery of assessment tools, one of which was identified as technically, culturally and linguistically inappropriate for his age, languages and cultural context. On this basis, it argues that the subject’s misrecognition assumes the form of linguistic and cultural injustice and from this, an epistemic injustice. Here the study’s findings resonate with Kerfoot and Simon-Vandenbergen (2015); Lemphane and Prinsloo (2014), Makalela (2014). Furthermore, it identifies elements of recognition and visibility via his teachers and peers at both of his schools which also have multilingualistic and cultural underpinnings. It argues that within and between Kabelo’s playworld and academic performance world, there are similarities and dialectical contradictions that combine as moments of both systemic recognition and misrecognition. Within this messy mix I argue that the dialectical contradictions require distinct illumination and that the eight contradictions which I have identified fall within Engeström and Sannino’s (2011) classification of contradictions as critical conflicts. In this respect, they manifest as moments of systemic misrecognition that are analytically distinct and represents a form of social inequality and injustice. To address these moments of systemic misrecognition, it offers a preliminary list of Kabelo’s play capabilities that can contribute towards the further development of a broader ideal-theoretical list of children’s play capabilities. Such a list can operationalise the socially-just recognition of a universal list of play capabilities that are integral to children’s funds of knowledge. In this way, it can also contribute concretely towards play policy design, implementation and practice.

6.5.1 Contributions to knowledge

Through this study, I also contribute to existing conceptual and theoretical knowledge related to township children, boy-children, academic performance, children’s play and their digital realities. I have made visible, the views and voices of one township boychild as a contribution to existing knowledge on children’s agency, aspirations and capabilities. It adds to current thinking about the concept of a child’s playworld as his everyday, situated, socially-constructed world. While my research
found a growing body of knowledge on childhood, child development and children’s play, there was a dearth of literature that utilises the concept of a child’s situated playworld and how such a playworld is constructed as his everyday lived play experience. I showed how Lindqvist (1996) applied the concept of playworld in the context of its creative integration into pedagogical practice. Whereas I focused on the concept as a situated universe that is socially constructed by the child. Here I tried to build on existing research on the lifeworld of children in general and more specifically, on South African township children who are living and schooling under conditions of social marginality. The latter includes the contributions by Sibanda and Kajee (2019), Lemphane & Prinsloo (2014), Domingo-Salie (2018); Sonamzi, (2018); Joorst (2015); and Fataar & Du Plooy (2012). This study illuminates how children’s play is a fundamental dimension to the way they create their lifeworld knowledge.

I developed further, the construction that much of the boychild’s everyday playworld involves the development of his play capabilities and that these are integral to his *funds of knowledge* as children. The inter-relationship, comparison and contrast between a boychild’s playworld and play capabilities, with his world of academic performance, is a further attempt at filling a glaring knowledge gap through this study. Here I contribute towards debates on children’s everyday knowledge, its dialectical relationship with their schooled knowledge construction (Hoadley, 2011), and how these dialectics are unfolding in a digital age. Understanding an African township child’s everyday lived play experience within a rapidly-encroaching digital world, is a further dimension that this research endeavour sought to contribute.

I have also highlighted a range of play forms in the playworld of one township boychild. In this way I have contributed to the existing literature on the variety of play forms with particular reference to pretend-play (Gaskins, 2013); creative constructionist play such as making (Alper, 2013; Resnick, 2017); digital play (Stephen & Plowman, 2014); violent or dark play (Sadownik, 2017); and how these play forms intersect (Thomas & Brown, 2009b) within a child’s playworld. The latter unsettles the dominant conversations on play as being primarily fun and joyful as propositioned by Gray, (2013). I have suggested that play can also be dark and it can also be serious when considered from the perspective of the township boychild’s everyday lived experience, as exemplified by Kabelo’s portrait.
I have provided empirical ethnographic and sociological knowledge to prevailing knowledge conversations on children and their engagement in the digital world. The latter includes the existing literature on digital play, children and digital media, digital learning and more broadly information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D). For example, Selwyn and Facer (2014) lament the dearth of sociological knowledge in the field of educational technologies and calls for its sociological turn. This is also relevant in the face of a dearth of sociological studies on township children concerning their digital access, adoption and use in South Africa. The work of Lemphane & Prinsloo,( 2014), Bosch (2013), Walton & Pallitt, (2012), and Kreutzer (2009), rank among the few studies of township children and digital technologies in South Africa. Here I have also contributed to present-day understanding of children from the global South and technologies in comparison with the predominance of literature based on Northern contexts. The latter includes the research by Livingstone & Sefton-Green (2016) on their analysis of 28 youth in the UK; Erstad (2012) on digital learning lives of youth in Norway. The research also hopes to have contributed to studies related to children’s subjectivities including in the digital arena such as that conducted by Sarkar (2016) on young girls in India and the research on girls and mobile technologies in Kenya by Zelezny-Green (2018). Moreover, the study also contributes to the evolving debate on children and youth as digital natives (Brown & Czerniewicz, 2010) in an African context.

Furthermore, I have added to collective knowledge on the underperforming boychild in a South African township context as exemplified by Kabelo’s portrait. It has illuminated the township boychild’s voice and everyday experience in contrast to dominant conversations on performativity (Perold et al., 2012) and its role in the misrecognition (Bozalek, 2011) of the township boychild. It also contributes towards to education scholarship on social justice in South Africa (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Du Plooy & Zilindile, 2014; Tikly, 2011) by offering mechanisms for operationalising socially-just recognition through a proposed initial play capabilities list.

Finally, the thesis is a contribution towards African scholarship not only about the playworld of a township boychild in Africa but also as a research project created by an aspiring African woman scholar. Here the intention is also to contribute towards Africa-centred knowledges as discussed by Cooper and Morrell (2014).
**Contribution to qualitative research methodology**

Alongside the intended contributions to conceptual, theoretical and empirical knowledge, I hopes to have made a methodological contribution in the following ways: As a qualitative study, the thesis adds value to the conversations on children’s academic performance that have had a predominant quantitative methodological focus (Kotze, 2017; Moholwane, 2016; Spaul, 2013). By responding to the primary research question, it contributes a richness in qualitative understanding to the vast body of statistical knowledge of academic underperformance in South Africa.

Moreover, within a critical ethnographic research methodology (Carspecken, 1996; Geertz, 1973; Wolcott, 2003) the study contributes a hybrid of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) and portraiture (Lawrence-lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005) to support the participatory development of a narrative portrait of Kabelo. Here the combination of a range of research methods adds further value. These included the use of document reviews, interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires and digital story-telling. The latter included the use of workshops that involved storyboard development, digital photos and videos created by the research subject.

The methodological and analytical choices made in this study also enabled the creation of rich, thick and deep stories of how one boy learns, makes, thinks and plays to create meaning, make sense of the world and construct knowledge through play. In this respect, through its attempt at illuminating the voice and everyday lived play experience of the research subject, I have contributed towards more inclusive ways of knowing by adding to the partial and incomplete knowledges of other actors in the education knowledge production system. In this respect too, within the arena of digital technologies and children, inspired by Wang's (2013) call for the production of ‘thick data’, the study contributes an example of thick, small ethnographic data based on the digital world of a South African township boy-child. The style and narrative technique adopted to write Kabelo’s portrait using the Freytag pyramid (Irvine, 2014, 2019; Quickbase, 2019), dramatic acts and visual data displays (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2019), offers a creative example for the design of ethnographic narrative portraits of individual research subjects.
Furthermore, the analytical and methodological heuristic of third-generation cultural and historically-embedded activity theory and the use of activity systems analysis (ASA) (Engeström, 1987, 2015, 2001) provided clarity on how one nine-turning-ten-year-old Soweto boy engages in meaning-making, and self-making through play. His play-world as an activity system is compared in interaction with his world of academic performance as an activity system and the contradictions within and between are illuminated with the intention of transforming them.

6.5.2 Relevance and utility of the findings

An analysis of the Department of Social Development and the Department of Basic Education’s (DBE) policies on early childhood development (Atmore, 2013), children’s rights and children’s play (Talbot & Thornton, 2017), reflect a policy vacuum related to play from the perspective of the child’s everyday experience. My research findings potentially offer an opportunity to bridge these gaps through its focus on the child’s everyday lived play experience. Reflecting the current thinking in government at the time, the DBE’s Deputy Minister stated at its recent Africa Play Conference 2019: “We need curriculum change to build curiosity in children to allow them to dream.” (Department of Basic Education, et al. 2019, p.16). He said further that the system needed “rethinking and reimagining of learning” (DBE, ibid). With the idea of rethinking and reimagining learning, I hope to have contributed an approach to children’s play from the standpoint of promoting children's agency, participatory parity and the socially-just recognition of their play capabilities as being integral to their funds of knowledge. The thesis offers policy-decision-makers, influencers and intermediaries, an opportunity to engage on broader definitions of play that transcend the focus on adult perspectives and rights-based perspectives and also provides an initial list of play capabilities that can strengthen the existing social justice underpinnings in policy. Notably absent from the first conference on play in Africa in 2019 (DBE et.al. 2019, ibid), was the voices and experiences of children about their views, perspectives and capabilities

In terms of the implementation of policy through practice, the South African Department of Basic Education has also embarked on a programme to develop the play competencies of educators and practitioners in early childhood development (ECD) (Department of Basic Education, 2017). Here the DBE and its provincial education counterparts such as the Eastern Cape Department of Education, have
embarked on a journey to develop a play-centred curriculum and educator professional development and capacity building programme on play pedagogy. More specifically, the South African government has recently partnered with the Lego® Foundation and UNICEF on a programme to promote play in the curriculum and with Sesame Workshop to develop the capacity of ECD practitioners and educators to integrate play in their teaching practice. The focus of these programmes is on integrating creative play and joyful learning experiences for children by growing the confidence, knowledge and experience with playful learning practices among practitioners and educators (Isaacs, Roberts, Spencer-Smith, & Brink, 2019). This contribution on the play capabilities of a township boychild, has the potential to add value to existing pedagogical content on play-based learning in South Africa.

The study findings also has relevance for policy on digital learning. Given current DBE deliberations on the fourth industrial revolution and preparing learners for the twenty-first century (Basic Education Parliamentary Portfolio Committee, 2018), it is hoped that an update on the current White Paper on e-Education (Department of Education, 2004) will find relevance in the analysis on Kabelo’s situated access, use and naturalistic appropriation of digital technologies for play and learning. The relevance for policy is that the analysis provides a township child’s everyday lived play experience that remains conspicuously absent from current analyses and approaches on digital learning policy, strategy and practice in South Africa that have been provided by Amory et al., (2015) and Isaacs (2015). Moreover, the study provides some insight into the naturalistic digital literacies and competencies in township settings. In this way it offers a modest contribution to current deliberations in UNICEF (Nascimbeni & Vosloo, 2019), on understanding children’s digital literacies.

In terms of the world of practice, the portrait and related analysis on Kabelo’s playworld will engage with the current dominant discourse on reading underperformance and boys in South Africa. In this respect, the study proposes a gaze beyond the statistical narratives towards an empowerment discourse that challenges the deficit depiction of underperforming children. It is hoped that the research findings and analysis has provided an example of rich, storied experience with reading challenges that can potentially offer nuance to current programmatic designs on reading as learning (Henning, 2016). Here this study also sheds some
light on how parents also invest in mobile digital technologies to support their child’s literacy development in naturalistic settings. The latter remains understudied in South Africa.

There is also potential that the research findings will have relevance for the design of UNICEF’s interventions on child-friendly schools (UNICEF, 2012; Wright, Mannathoko, & Pasic, 2009) in ways that open up engagement on the inclusion and recognition of children’s play capabilities in child-friendly schools. Here the research provides insight on the extent to which parents and guardians can be supported to enhance children’s play capabilities as part of a proposed national parenting programme offered by Plaatjies (2019 in press).

6.5.3 Implications for further research

The research findings and analysis open up the prospect for further research on models for the integration of schooled knowledge and everyday knowledge in curriculum and beyond. It also raises the prospect of further exploration on the role of everyday play and play-world capabilities in supporting ongoing learning and concept development among children. The initial list of play-world capabilities offered by this study lays the basis for further exploration towards the development of a comprehensive, inclusive and participatory list that can involve the active participation of children and stakeholders. The methodologies applied by Biggeri & Mehrotra (2011); Robeyns (2006); Walker (2006); Wilson-Strydom (2016) can guide the design of an inclusive research project.

The research provided a preliminary list of play capabilities and argued that these need to be systemically recognised. It raises the prospect of further research on the notion of a universal list of play skills that can also feed into the current work in the UN about digital competencies for children (Nasciembeni and Vosloo, 2019) and mobile learning (UNESCO, 2019b). Further research can add a children’s capabilities approach to future iterations of digital capabilities framework for children.

It also opens up the need for research on South Africa-specific models for the integration of play capabilities in the curriculum, in ways that can actively involve the participation of children.
The research also offers a methodological contribution to doing participatory research with children using digital story-telling. The study did not make extensive use of models for digital storytelling proposed by Lambert (2010) and Pink (2007). Here too localised models of digital storytelling that takes account of local conditions for digital access and use would be worthy of further exploration. The relevance of such further research is that they offer mediums and mechanisms for children’s voices and participation as part of producing inclusionary knowledges. In these ways, knowledge production, research, policy and practice can open the way for more children to be seen and heard.

I explained that my learning journey was strongly influenced by the work I conducted in the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and its partner, UNICEF. At the start of this study, I highlighted the DBE’s rallying slogan “Every child is a national asset”. In closing this thesis, I invoke UNICEF’s mobilising maxim: “For every child”. To this, I add the appeal and main point of this study: “For every child…the socially-just recognition of their play capabilities’.


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ETHICS CLEARANCE

Dear Shafika Isaacs

Ethical Clearance Number: 2018-061

Exploring the Lifeworlds of Four Soweto Boys

Ethical clearance for this study is granted subject to the following conditions:

- If there are major revisions to the research proposal based on recommendations from the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted.
- If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, it remains the duty of the student to submit a new application.
- It remains the student’s responsibility to ensure that all ethical forms and documents related to the research are kept in a safe and secure facility and are available on demand.
- Please quote the reference number above in all future communications and documents.

The Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee has decided to

☑ Grant ethical clearance for the proposed research.
☐ Provisionally grant ethical clearance for the proposed research
☐ Recommend revision and resubmission of the ethical clearance documents

Sincerely,

Dr David Robinson

Chair: FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

7 April 2020
An example of parental consent
B1. Multi-sited Observation Instrument

B1.1 Classroom observation

The purpose of the classroom observation is to observe the SPECIFIC BOY LEARNER during a lesson. What he does, how he engages and responds to the content of the lesson and the way the lesson is taught; the tools the teacher asks him to use during the lesson, how he relates to his peers and the rest of the class during the lesson.

**Description**

Fill in the box below when classroom observation commences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Date of observation:</strong></th>
<th>What is today’s date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Start time of lesson observed:</strong></td>
<td>What is the time when you started observing the lesson?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lesson Subject and Topic:</strong></td>
<td>What is the learning area being taught and what is the topic being taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class:</strong></td>
<td>Which class is being observed? Grade 2 Zulu or Grade 2 Sesotho?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name of boy:</strong></td>
<td>Name the boychild who is being observed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lesson context**

Describe the context in which the lesson occurred. Note the following

1. What is the time of day?
2. What is the weather like?
3. Is there anything noteworthy about the date of the classroom observation?
4. Are there any visitors in the classroom? If so, how many and why are they visiting?

5. Describe the seating arrangements in the class

6. Note any changes to the classroom setting, the walls and black board

7. Note where the teacher is located.

8. Note where visitors are located

**Lesson Activities**

1. Describe each activity that the teacher engaged the class in during this lesson

2. Note and describe the tasks that are given to the children and how the boychild responds to each of the tasks

3. Note and describe the tools that he uses during the tasks and activities. Are they worksheets, white board tablets, koki pens, notebooks, workbooks?

4. Note and describe the subject content that is being taught

5. Note and describe his demeanour and whether he engages with his peers during the lesson

6. Note and describe whether he moves around during the lesson

7. Note and describe his talk during the lesson, whether he talks to his peers, to the teacher or visitors

**Photograph and video checklist**

At each classroom observation, take photos of

1. Classroom layout: eating area, reading corner, wall displays, bookshelves, teacher corner, ‘naughty corner’, spaces for when children get sick, posters

2. Class timetable and proof of lesson topic that is being delivered

3. Other children’s activities during the lesson

4. The boychild’s activities such as writing in notebooks, engagements with the teacher

5. Teacher giving instructions from chalkboard
For video-recording, record scenes at one to two minute intervals for the duration of a lesson.

**Researcher's reflections**

Note any reflections based on the classroom observation.

**B1.2 Home observation**

The purpose of the home observation is to observe the boy while he is at home, what he does, where he is located during specific activities, how he engages with the people in his home, the tools and equipment that he engages with at home.

**Description**

Fill in the box below when classroom observation commences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of observation: What is today's date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start time of home observation: What is the time when you started observing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of boy: Name the boychild who is being observed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Home context**

Describe the context in which the boy engages in activities at home

9. What is the time of day?

10. What is the weather like?

11. Is there anything noteworthy about the date of the home observation?

12. Describe the surrounding area of the home; the nature of the street, the houses, if there are shops around, if there are people around, describe what is happening outside the home.

13. Note any changes to the home setting, the walls, photographs.

14. Note the sounds you are hearing. Is there a radio or TV playing?
**Home Activities**

8. Describe each activity that the boy engages in at home

9. Note and describe the tools that he uses during the activities at home. Cell phone, tablets, TV, plates and cups, soccer balls

10. Note and describe his demeanour and the way he engages with people around him

11. Note and describe whether he moves around during home visit

12. Note and describe his talk during the home visit, whether he talks to the people in his home. Note the way that he talks and the way they talk to him.

**Photograph and video checklist**

At each home observation, take photos of

6. Outside the home: the street, houses in the neighbourhood, the vehicles, shops, the physical infrastructure of the homes, and neighbouring homes.

7. Home layout: eating area, sleeping area, TV area, reading area,

8. The boychild’s activities during the home visit.

For video-recording, record scenes at one to two minute intervals for the duration of the home visit.

**Researcher's reflections**

Note any reflections based on the home visit
B2. Teacher Interview Schedule

**About the Teacher**

1. For how many years have you been teaching?
2. For how many years have you been teaching at this school?
3. How long have you been teaching in this class?
4. What are your teaching qualifications?
5. Are you pursuing further studies?

**About Boychild**

**Academic performance**

1. Did he repeat a grade?
2. Which grade did he repeat?
3. Why did he repeat a grade?
4. What has been his performance like in Grade 2 in Mathematics and Languages?
5. Why is he not performing well?
6. How does he perform in class during a lesson in general?
7. How does he respond in the computer room?

**Social**

1. Does he have friends in class?
2. At school?
3. Does he show that he feels a connection and belonging to the school? In the class?
4. Where does he live?
5. With whom does he live?
6. Who are his parents?
7. What do his parents say about his life at home?

8. What is he like on the playground?

Aspirations

1. What is he very good at?

2. What are his aspirations when he grows up?

Teacher views about boy

1. From a teacher’s perspective, how do you feel about him when he is in your classroom,

2. when he is on the playground,

3. when he gets his results from you

4. How does he relate to you?
A ‘Small and Thick’ Portrait of Kabelo’s Digital Play

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Abstract—This article analyses the part of a broader ethnographic narrative portrait of a boy called Kabelo that deals with his everyday digital play. Kabelo lives and schools in Soweto, South Africa and was followed over 16 months. His portrait is a response to the dearth of sociological knowledge on the everyday digital lives of African children. A social justice orientation combined with critical ethnography, narrative inquiry and portraiture provided the conceptual and methodological framework and guided the use of a range of qualitative data collection strategies. Through activity systems analysis (ASA) (Engeström, 2015) the interrelationships and tensions within his world of digital play are analysed. The study concludes that Kabelo’s relative access to mobile digital technologies illuminates his mobilities within and between his world of digital play and enables his voice, agency and capabilities. However, tensions exist based on the misrecognition of the subject’s agency and capabilities in policy. The study recommends the socially-just recognition of digital play capabilities as part of a list of children’s play capabilities for inclusion in policy and formal learning systems. Attention to the production of small and thick digital ethnographies to complement big and broad data is also recommended.

Keywords— m-learning; digital ethnography, narrative, portraiture, South Africa; Soweto; boys; digital play; children; capabilities; play; social justice

1 Introduction

This article is a deliberate attempt at an in-depth gaze into the everyday digital play, a ten-year-old African township23 boy-child, pseudo-named Kabelo. It is a response to the absence of voice and participation of African children in global conversations about them, including on mobile learning (m-learning) and more recently, on emerging ‘frontier technologies’ for sustainable development (Ramalingam, Hernandez, Prieto Martin, & Faith, 2016). It is also a response to the preponderance of big and broad data, the disruptions in traditional qualitative research methods (Burrows & Savage, 2014), and the accompanying dearth of thick data (Wang, 2013) such as those offered by ethnographic and sociological knowledge on educational technologies (Selwyn & Facer, 2014; Selwyn, 2019).

Academic scholarship and practice knowledge on m-learning has been limited to systematic reviews (Crompton, Burke, & Gregory, 2017); theoretical modelling (Traxler, 2016; Sharples, et al, 2007), landscape reviews

23 A township in South Africa, refers to physically-bounded geographical spaces that were reserved for black people during Apartheid (1948-1994). Today they are spaces where mostly impoverished, predominantly black, working-class and under-class communities reside.

This paper aligns with the quest for more and better ethnographic deep-dive studies on mobile, digital lives associated with the emergence of digital ethnography (Pink et al., 2016). To this, it adds the need for a social justice perspective, particularly in the face of persistent structural inequalities such as that experienced in South Africa (Badat & Sayed, 2014). It builds on the few studies that have illuminated children’s subjectivities and digital diffusion in naturalistic settings in the UK (Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016; Sharpe et al., 2016). Ethnographic studies by Sefton-Green & Erstad, (2009) of teenagers in Norway; Lempfene & Prinsloo (2014) and Walton & Pallitt’s (2012) on children in Khayelitsha24 offer further examples. While these studies provide rich, nuanced insight into the way an encroaching digital world manifests in the everyday lives of children in naturalistic settings, they do not occupy the mainstream of knowledge production that prioritizes quantitative methodologies. This article contends that knowing the child’s digital world contributes to a richer understanding of the way large scale changes are experienced in daily life.

2 The study: school performance vs everyday play in the life of a township boy

The study on which this article is based, was prompted by two significant influences on the learning landscape for children: an emerging pattern of boy academic underperformance in South Africa (Broekhuizen & Spaull, 2017) and worldwide (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Hooper, 2016) and dramatic shifts in learning catalyzed by mobile digital technologies (Traxler, 2016) amidst an unfolding neoliberal globalization (Ball, 2013). The former lends credibility to a dominant deficit narrative about a systemic learning crisis (World Bank, 2017) while the latter has led to debates about the value of m-learning and ‘frontier technologies’ in education (UNESCO, 2019). However, absent are the voices, views and perspectives of the children and an understanding of the way systemic changes are experienced by individual children. The study’s purpose was to make visible the storied perspectives of the township boy-child and his experience with academic performance and everyday play and within this, his digital play. It was based on a purposefully selected sample of four boys who were followed for 12 months, one of whom, Kabelo, became a choice for further in-depth first-person study. Kabelo was followed for a further four months. Kabelo was chosen because his underperformance was framed as a learner with special educational needs (LSEN), his move to an LSEN school and the nature of his access and use of digital technologies. Due to space constraints, this article only illuminates the everyday digital play dimensions of the Kabelo’s portrait.

3 Background

Theorists of human play agree that through play, children explore, make sense of, and create much of their world (Nilsson, Ferholt, & Lecusay, 2018; Vygotsky, 1967; Piaget, 1962; Bruner, Jolly, & Sylva, 1976). The study of Kabelo foregrounds children’s lived experience (van Manen, 2016) of the world, as a lived play experience. To this, Huizinga (1949) adds that play is integral to the culture of being human. Thus, from the child’s viewpoint,

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24 Khayelitsha is one of Cape Town’s largest and fastest growing black townships
play is not always joyful; nor trivial; nor an end in itself; nor is it about just playing games, and it is not always free. Moreover, in the 21st century, the child’s playworld is continually being infused with a digital world (Albrecht & Tabone, 2017). This digital world involves situated engagement with digital cultures mediated by socially-constructed digital tools, signs and symbols, the design, production and consumption of which are embedded and embodied in culture and disparate social relations (Feenberg, 2017).

Digital play is not only a reference to digital gameplay but manifests as the complex entanglement of everyday life with the rapid diffusion of digital technologies; the influence of the digital media industry and the associated commercialization and marketisation of play, popular media culture and digital gameplay (Lester & Russell, 2014). Digital play also includes m-learning, which involves “learning across multiple contexts, through social and content interactions, using personal electronic devices” (Crompton, 2013:4).

That Kabelo lives in a structurally-polarizing South Africa, necessitates a social justice orientation. Fraser’s (2008) three-dimensional model of social justice with an emphasis on misrecognition and recognition is combined with the capabilities approach (CA) (Sen 2005; Nussbaum 2002). Recognition relates to whose attributes and capabilities are regarded by society as valuable and the way an individual is seen and acknowledged reciprocally as an equal by other individuals, institutions and systems. It is linked to the concept of misrecognition which highlights the explicit and implicit, overt and subtle, external and internalized ways in which power-marginalized individuals experience invisibility, inequality, disadvantage, exclusion, marginalization and powerlessness within institutions and systems (Fraser, ibid).

Sen (2005) and Nussbaum’s (2002) complement Fraser (ibid) by illuminating the quality of life that individuals are capable of choosing. Sen (ibid) defines capability as the individual’s freedom, opportunities and choices to do what she or he considers to be valuable. Sen (ibid) and Nussbaum’s (ibid) reference is to the human capability to fulfill the essential quality of life functions in which agency and the freedom to choose are crucial dimensions.

4 Methodology

Wang (2013) highlights the value of ‘thick data’ in relation to big data. In support, albeit critically, this article analyses a ‘small and thick’ ethnographic portrait, based on critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996; Geertz, 1973) narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) and portraiture. Portraiture, as a form of narrative inquiry, listens for a story and illuminates the relationship between researcher and research subject (Lawrence-lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The research questions ask pertinently, what are Kabelo’s stories of his everyday exposure to digital technologies, and how does he experience his everyday digital play?

4.1 Methods

Data collection strategies included direct observation, interviews; focus group discussions with four boys and separately, with their mothers (Patton, 2015); and digital story-telling (Lambert, 2010). The latter involved the use of mobile phones given to each of the boys to support the storytelling about their daily lives based on storytelling workshops held with them.
Data was captured systematically through audio recordings of interviews and focus group discussions; photographs and video recordings of direct observations during site visits, and the use of field notes. Audio and video recordings were transcribed and captured manually and were consolidated into a spreadsheet which enabled the systematic, iterative coding, categorizing and thematizing of chunks of data as they emerged over the 16 months.

The research limitations included that the researcher was not conversant with the African languages that Kabelo, his friends and family speak and understand. While the researcher was supported by a translator, he was not present on some occasions. In these cases, Kabelo was encouraged to speak in his preferred language, and the audio recorded conversations would be translated subsequently.

4.2 Data analysis: from data to portrait

Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory methodology was applied premised on theory construction derived from iterative qualitative data collection and simultaneous, progressive data analysis. Over time, 1254 codes were developed from the data, and through an iterative process of interpretation, inference and meaning-making, 38 categories were developed, from which ten themes emerged. Five of these themes were related to play: digital play, pretend-play, game-play, play as making, violent play and play and care. From these, overarching concepts of play capabilities, recognition and misrecognition emerged, linked to social justice.

To analyze the inter-relationship between emerging concepts, the study employed activity systems analysis (ASA) (Engeström, 2015) as a heuristic. Within his digital play activity system, Kabelo is the subject who mediates his world through the use of digital tools and signs to make meaning, under given conditions and rules, with particular communities in which varying relations of power reside through a division of labour (Figure 1).

![Figure 1: The structure of Kabelo’s digital play as an activity system (Engeström, 1987:78)](image)

5 Findings and analysis

5.1 Subject

Kabelo’s portrait reveals he is a playful, digitally-engaged, multilingual child who is capable of making choices, judgements and decisions, and who can act with agency. His confidence, assertiveness, and agency are supported by his appropriation of a range of digital artefacts within a nurturing stable, supportive, church-going
community and family. He is also an aspirant child with an imagination about a desired future. As reflected in his mobile games, he aspires to be a truck driver, a fast car owner, an engineer and he wants to go to the university in Soweto.

5.2 Tools and signs

I apply Warschauer & Matuchniak (2010) concept of digital access by which they mean not just the physical availability of internet-enabled computing devices but also the factors that support or constrain access, mainly in the home. Phyfer, Burton, & Leoshut (2016) found that 46 per cent of South African children were able to access the Internet whenever they wanted while Lemphane & Prinsloo (2014:15) found that the children in Khayelitsha had no computer access at all and were allowed only limited access to their parents’ mobile phones.

In Kabelo’s parents’ home, however, they had a radio; a digital satellite television (DSTV) subscription with wide range of local and global broadcast channels, an Explora that enables television-on-demand; a DVD player; a handheld Leap-pad game player, a toy laptop, and Kabelo had a TV in his bedroom in both his parents’ and grandparents’ homes. He also has access to his mother’s smartphone and later, to a tablet which he shares with his mother. On his tablet, were a few neatly displayed applications ranging from Facebook, two bible apps, YouTube, English language and mathematics apps as well as ShareIt, a popular offline sharing app. This was evident when WhatsApp messages would be sent to him, and his mother and they would respond a few days later. “I didn’t have datas”. Kabelo’s mother downloads free apps, but she “pays in data which costs a lot of money.” Thus while Kabelo has widespread access to digital devices, he faces challenges with unaffordable data (Gillwald, Mothobi, & Rademan, 2018).

5.3 Object

Kabelo’s portrait reveals that the object of his digital play is for meaning-making and self-making by occupying a range of offline and some online virtual spaces, moving in and between these spaces and creating local virtual networks. Much of his various forms of digital play take place in the home often simultaneously, alongside mundane activities such as eating while the TV plays local or news channels, often as background noise. He uses a mobile device while he eats at home; when he is in a car or on public transport, and he watches TV or videos in the hour before bedtime.

Kabelo’s digital play is mainly as a digital consumer. He watches downloaded movies such as Fast and Furious25, and at times, online videos. “Me I am taking a selfie. I feel happy about taking photos because I like photos because it’s nice and it is fun, and it makes me happy”. Kabelo’s mother’s phone and the phone he was given, contain numerous photos, many of which were ‘selfies’, of him smiling, pouting, in a ‘gangsta’ pose, posing with his school uniform, with his sister, his mother and his grandfather. He creates videos of life in Soweto which include his Sunday church attendance, swimming at the local public swimming pool. His self-made video clips contain recordings of him dancing to local music or musical scenes of local artists performing on TV. They further include clips from Cartoon Network or Msanzi TV26, or of him singing gospel songs in

25 Fast and Furious is an American media franchise owned by Universal Pictures that based on a series of action films mainly concerned with illegal street racing, heists and spies.

26 A reference to a suite of local TV channels
Sesotho, the language he speaks most often. He recorded significant chunks of the funeral of Winnie Mandela on his phone while it was showing on television. All of his self-produced videos are conducted in English, and his recordings of rap music and Mzansi TV channel programmes are in Sesotho with the latter showing English subtitles. While he produces selfies and videos, these are not shared with others. He has never played video games on a console player or a social game online with other children, in any of his homes, which resonates with the findings of Lemphane & Prinsloo (2014) on children in Khayelitsha.

For learning, he ‘reads’ from a bible app that includes an English voice-over, for 20 minutes on Fridays and Saturdays. He also plays with an arithmetic app and an English vocabulary app when his mother asks him to. When asked which learning apps he likes most, Kabelo refers to the truck driving game app called Euro Trucks. He demonstrated how he uses the control icons to steer the vehicle in motion and to park it in the designated parking bay. He also downloaded a car driving game where he beat other cars in a race. “I love this game because I can drive fast”, he tells me while playing the game.

Kabelo uses Google searches when doing his homework, and communicates mainly with family via WhatsApp. He does not subscribe to popular social media such as Facebook or Instagram but uses ShareIt often to swap videos and photos with friends offline.

Thus, Kabelo’s digital play not only involves gameplay. It reflects the presence of the popular media culture in his daily life and his use of mobile digital spaces that are more offline than online, and he moves between these depending on data access. His digital consumption is mainly for entertainment, some learning and engagement with friends through offline networks. Much of the literature refers to selfie culture based on the public sharing of selfies and videos on social networks such as among youth in India (Dutta et al., 2016). For Kabelo producing selfies are about self-expression and self-making in the way Bruner, (1991) explains as being “all in the constructing” of the self and of a culture, in the making of the text or, in this case, the photograph or video (1991:27).

5.4 Rules

The rules in his digital play activity system include global and national laws and policies related to children’s formal rights, their right to play and their rights to privacy and security in their use of digital media. Third, Bellerose, Dawkins, Keltie, & Pihl (2014) provide ten key findings from their focus group discussions with children around the world, one of which is that child-centred definitions of risks and opportunities with social media are needed and that policy-makers need to listen to children and not assume that they know what is best for them. In South Africa, the digital rights of children are under-researched and under-represented in policy, as shown by Byrne & Burton (2017) on South African children’s use of digital technologies. In this respect, Kabelo’s presence in policy on children and digital rights are limited.

Kabelo’s digital play, is also governed by ‘informal’ rules such as which programmes he is allowed to watch on TV and the games he is allowed to play on his tablet and his mother’s mobile phone and the amount of screen time he is allowed when he is at home. There is evidence of his mother controlling his screen time and encouragement for him to play outside in the garage area.
5.5 Community
In Kabelo’s play-world activity system, the members of his community are his parents, relatives and friends who share the object of meaning-making and self-making. Community and friendships are mediated through ShareIt, which is widely used by Kabelo and his friends to share music, games, videos and photos offline. Thus, community networks are created albeit offline, through such sharing. It also that Kabelo balances his gameplay with his friends outside and his digital friends with whom he shares and swaps music and video via ShareIt. This differs markedly from Lemphane & Prinsloo's (2014) reference to the online social gaming of a more privileged group of children living in South African suburbs.

5.6 Division of Labour
The division of labour in Kabelo’s digital play is evident from his role as an ardent consumer of global digital media products, reflecting the presence of global, commercialized digital media corporations in his daily life. There are also moments of vertical relations with the adults in his home. On one home visit, Kabelo was playing with WordSearch, an app on his mother’s mobile phone. When asked whether he downloaded the app, he said that he did not and pointed to his mother. They argued over who downloaded it. He insisted that it was her. This scene demonstrates the ways in which Kabelo asserts his digital play preferences, reflecting his sense of agency in relationship with the adults in his life.

5.7 Outcome
The outcome of Kabelo’s digital play activity system suggests that he develops digital play capabilities while at the same time, his digital play is imbued the consumption of a mix of commercialized local and global digital cultures. He believes that he learns to cook from watching the cooking TV channel because he tries out recipes in the kitchen; he develops political opinions from watching the news also exemplified by his articulated high regard for Winnie Mandela; he claims to be streetwise from watching Mzansi TV and listening to rap songs from popular Soweto artists. His mother also believes that the truck game provides him with knowledge about how to drive and park a car or a truck. “When I drive my car, he tells me “mummy you must put the car into neutral now” when I am at a robot, and now you must put the car in first gear and drive mummy” when the robot turns green.”

The findings also reflect his creativity, design and making capability in the production of selfies that he enhances with patterns, frames and captions and his self-made videos about his daily life in Soweto. While it reflects some digital capabilities, it also reveals limited digital citizenship (Hollandsworth, Dowdy, & Donovan, 2011) insofar as Kabelo lacks awareness of Internet and digital safety. These emergent digital play capabilities open up the prospect for expanding conversations on lists of children’s capabilities as developed by Biggeri, Ballet, & Comim (2011) through further development of their play capabilities and digital literacies (Nascimbeni & Vosloo, 2019).

5.8 Contradictions
Engeström (2001:137) explains that contradictions drive the activity system as sources of change and development. There appear to be tensions at different levels in Kabelo’s digital play activity system. One of
these tensions exists between the subject and rules of the system, more specifically, the subject as an agential and capable child for whom digital play is integral to his being as per Huizinga (1949). There is a tension between the subject and how he assumes agency through his digital play and how this remains misrecognised (Fraser, 2008) in current, limited rights-oriented policies and laws, as shown by (Phyfer et al., 2016). Nthontho’s (2017) review of children’s rights literature found that policy strides were made to legitimize children’s rights in terms of their protection, participation and resource provision. However, there are several ways in which children are not conceptualised as equal partners and stakeholders. She provides the example of the depiction of children as future adults, which shifts attention away from their conditions in the present. To resolve these contradictions will require further attention to children’s digital rights and citizenship in policy.

6 Conclusions and implications

Thus, in answering the question of how Kabelo experiences his everyday digital play, his portrait reveals how the digital and play are infused in his everyday lifeworld as a township boy. They show that everyday digital play assumes different modalities both online and offline and as movements within and between these modalities. They further highlight the emergence of ‘informal’ learning spaces and networks that can influence his formal academic learning spaces. The study shows further that there are emergent tensions between existing policy on Kabelo’s everyday digital play practices and that digital play capabilities emerge as part of his everyday knowledge while his digital citizenship remains limited. This tension assumes the form of misrecognition. For this to be remedied will require the socially-just recognition of Kabelo’s digital play capabilities as a crucial part of his agency. The implications are that a shift in policy and practice there will need to be a stronger interplay between his everyday digital play and the capabilities that emerge from this, with formal academic knowledge, in curriculum change and the culture of learning and schooling, as well as in national policy on digital citizenship for children. Further research on valorizing children’s digital play capabilities will also be required in the context of a universal, albeit flexible, contextually-relevant list of children’s capabilities such as those developed by Biggeri & Mehrotra (2011) and Walker (2006) as part of a social justice enterprise. Attention to the production of small and thick digital ethnographies to complement big and broad data is also recommended.

7 Acknowledgement

This research was supported by the National Research Fund (NRF) grant number 98573. It was undertaken as part of a doctoral study at in the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg. Opinions and conclusions are those of the author and are not attributable to the NRF. Professor Elizabeth Henning (South African Research Chair on the ‘Integration of Mathematics, Science and Languages in the Primary School’), provided the supervision support and enabling environment for this research.

8 References


UNESCO. (2019). Beijing Consensus on Artificial Intelligence in Education.


Dear Shafika Isaacs,

We are pleased to inform you that your following paper has been accepted for presentation at IMCL2019:

CONTRIBUTION DETAILS
---------------------------------------------
ID: 1139
Title: Kabelo’s Everyday Digital Play

REVIEW RESULT OF THE PROGRAM COMMITTEE:
This contribution has been accepted.

OVERVIEW OF REVIEWS
---------------------------------------------
Review 1
=======
Evaluation of the Contribution
---------------------------------------------
Quality of Content (10%): 6
Significance (10%): 6
Originality (10%): 6
Thematic Relevance (10%): 8
Presentation (10%): 10
Overall Recommendation (50%): 8
Total points (out of 100) : 76

Comments for the Authors
----------------------------
The paper presents the single-subject case study.
Major strengths:

1. The paper is well written and quite easy to follow.
2. The paper has a solid theoretical background.
3. The research methodology is straightforward.
4. The research question (a child’s academic underperformance) has a global significance.

Major weaknesses:

1. The scientific results seem to be rather obvious.
2. The author claimed that they employed the critical ethnography methodology, which implies not only the description of the given situation but also reflects on what could it be. The paper lacks such a reflection, though the author mentioned that the research is going to be continued, so the answer to the question might be found in the future.
3. It is unclear from the paper how the author suggests solving the problem of academic underperformance with the help of a mobile device.

Review 2

Evaluation of the Contribution

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Comments for the Authors

This paper would have benefited from elaboration on a perceived digital identity. How does he identify himself with respect to the prevalence of digital realm in his life. Perhaps, what I mean is that this paper outlines a third person view of his digital consciousness, while a first person consciousness reveals much more than a third person analysis. A personal narrative would have put this work in a much better perspective for the reader.

Review 3

Evaluation of the Contribution

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Overall Recommendation (50%): 5
Total points (out of 100) : 55

Comments for the Authors
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The authors provide a very good introduction that situate the paper and link it in the thematic context selected. However the methodology, findings and results sections have room for improvement.

Methodology:
1. the author(s) mention that the study employed a critical ethnography approach and qualitative data collection strategies to capture the lives of four boys. It is unclear why the focus is only on one of the boys here.
2. A range of data collection methods cited, but it is unclear how each of these were analyzed to provide the basis for the findings – more details necessary as to each of these methods and how they were used in the analysis.
3. How long did this study span?

Data & Analysis
4. Which collected data from the range of methods cited in the methodology section were used to form the basis of this study? Not clear what was analyzed using the constructivist grounded theory methodology.

Findings:
5. This section is quite descriptive and would benefit from some subheadings that could link with the ten key themes that emerged from the study, and provide relevant evidence for this.

Analysis:
6. This section makes reference to the production of media (selfies, video) but it is unclear how these were analyzed. There is a reference to selfie culture in this section, which may be beyond the scope of this paper – especially since it is unclear what has been analyzed for this study. Has the author(s) also analyzed the media produced by the participant? It is not clear.

Conclusion:
7. Possibly due to word count constraints, this is a rather short section, but still merits further development.