

# **Designing social identities: A case study of a primary school theatrical performance by Zulu children in an English, ex-model C school.**

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## **Abstract**

This paper selectively highlights the process and findings of a Masters dissertation. It presents a social semiotic analysis of a theatrical performance which was constructed and performed by a group of grade seven, Zulu speaking students as a representation of themselves. The performance took place in 2002 in an ex-model C primary school in Kwa-Zulu Natal and reflects the tensions between the students' identities that are located in the different fields of home, school, traditional settings and urban settings. The aim of the research is to amplify the participants' voice through the richness of their representation. It attempts to contest the notion that marginalised people are powerless in the face of hegemonic discourses, asserting rather that there is always agency.

This paper outlines the qualitative nature of the research process, with the performance text being a participatory, creative, multimodal, joint-construction involving the participants and the researcher. The performance was structured so that each scene represents one of the participants' social fields. The analysis of the performance follows this structure and explores the way discourses and identities are presented in the Traditional, Home, School and Urban scenes of the performance.

The analysis, part of which is included in this paper, draws on the New London Group's Multiliteracies theory, using the concepts of discourse, identity, interest and design, as well as drawing on Bourdieu's notions of field and capital. The study makes use of social semiotic analysis, drawing particularly from Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, to explore the multimodal nature of the performance, analysing the linguistic mode alongside those of the visual, the gestural and the spatial.

This paper attempts to be consistent with the multimodal nature of the performance and so presents the data through photographs, sketches and video clips integrated with the written text.

## **Introduction**

In 1992, during the transition to a democratic government, the National Party proposed a single education system for South Africa; schools could choose how they were going to be structured. Most 'white' schools chose the Model C design, where

parents were authorised as the School Governing Body to make decisions regarding language policy, admission requirements and funding extra teachers through elevated school fees (Grant Lewis and Motala 2004:119). The term 'Model C' has stuck and is used to refer to schools which, though they officially have the same status as all other schools in South Africa, have a legacy of privilege. These former 'white' schools are unofficially known as ex-model C schools.

In 1994, South Africa elected its first democratic government with the African National Congress (ANC) taking power. This political party had been the main player in the struggle against Apartheid and was voted into power by the majority of South Africans. Since 1994, the ANC has been putting most of its effort into appearing to right the enormous imbalance in resources that had been heavily in white citizens' favour. A large chunk of the national budget is allocated to education and the old, traditional curriculum from the apartheid era was replaced with a more inclusive system in the form of Curriculum 2005 which held Outcomes Based Education and learner-centeredness as fundamental principles.

Despite the policy reform, which includes the Constitutional recognition of eleven local African languages and influenced the launch of a new Language in Education Policy (Mda 2004:177), there still appears to exist enormous disparity between schools. Though massive transformation has taken place on a governmental level, this has not necessarily filtered down to the level of school practice. Ex-Model C schools are becoming increasingly multiracial and multilingual, but many schools seem not to be changing their systems to accommodate the needs of their diverse learner base, often needing to maintain the reputation of upholding their traditions to keep white parents enrolling their children in the schools rather than in private schools. (Alborough 2002, Mda 2004).

In 2001, I was teaching in an ex-model C primary school in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Many children entered school when they were six and were plunged directly into an English-only medium school, not to encounter any learning of their mother tongue until grade seven when they were given Zulu lessons at a very basic, third language level. The following year, while studying through the University of Natal, I chose to return to the school as a researcher. Having noticed that the Zulu children in the

school were in a position where they were speaking English in an academic domain and Zulu in more social domains (Alborough 2002), I became particularly interested in the way that these Zulu children conceptualised their identity; did they consider themselves more English than Zulu or vice versa? I was expecting to draw conclusions about the hegemony of school systems and the alienation of students from mainstream practices (Gee 1996a, Heath 1988, Street 1984) but as in most research processes, my assumptions proved too simplistic to capture the reality of the students' stories (Alborough 2002).

The 2004 masters study drew on the end product of this 2002 research process, a theatrical performance that was constructed by the group of participants and performed for an audience of teachers and peers. To elicit meaning from such a complex text requires venturing into the analysis of multiple modes, with multimodality referring to the interrelationship of many modes of meaning with a mode being one way of expressing meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, New London Group 2000, Thesen 2001, Stein and Newfield 2002, Stein 2003). The New London Group (2000) suggest that there are five modes of meaning which include the linguistic mode, the visual, the audio, the spatial and the gestural mode. Multimodal then refers to meanings that are expressed through many modes simultaneously. The study being multimodal meant that it had to delve below the surface of linguistic meaning expressed through dialogue to look at other modes of meaning, those of the visual, the spatial, the gestural, and the audio.

The study is titled 'Designing social identities: A case study of a primary school theatrical performance by Zulu children in an English ex-model C school. Because the participants constructed the performance as a representation of themselves the study attempts to unravel the Discourses that are at work in the participants' lives, examining how the participants actively speak to and act through these Discourses according to the social fields in which they position themselves (Bourdieu 1990, Gee 1990, Gee 1996a, Gee 1996b, Kress and van Leeuwen 2001).

The study describes the opening up of a space through the 2002 research process where school children could relatively freely and safely speak out, and then, through the 2004 analysis process, attempts to uncover the complexity of what they said and

are still saying. Above all then, it seeks to study their voices closely and intently that they might have another opportunity to be heard.

This paper seeks to focus specifically on one scene in the performance text to provide insight into the analysis process, the research findings and into the vivid way the participants' constructed a portrayal of their lives. It will begin with a discussion of the research process; looking into the way the project developed and the participants' stories unfolded. This discussion will be followed by a close analysis of the second scene in the performance, the School scene. This scene allows for the interweaving of theory, methodology and analysis and will attempt to explore the main findings of the research in terms of the single scene. This will involve analysing the scene according to multiple modes and then evaluating the significance of the concepts of Discourse, capital, field and identity.

### **The Research Process**

As mentioned above, the school featured in the study, being an ex-model C school and therefore traditionally white, was extremely privileged under an Apartheid government and was equipped with good facilities and a staff which is still predominantly white and therefore also privileged by their past education in schools like this one. It should be noted however, that the staff do not have fluency in African languages nor do they have insight into the backgrounds of many of their learners. These are significant disadvantages but ones that remain unrecognised by the school. In terms of school facilities and economic capital, the school is seen to provide superior education compared to schools in the townships which were enormously disadvantaged in terms of facilities and enormous staff/pupil ratios.

The school's demographics have changed radically over the last ten years and children of different races travel to the school from all over town. The school's language policy makes it an English medium school, so that all subjects are taught in English except for the teaching of Afrikaans as a second language. Zulu classes are implemented in grade seven at a third or fourth language level.

When designing the research, the Olivantsvlei Fresh Stories Project, documented in Stein and Newfield (2002) provoked the development of the research process beyond a simple interviewer/interviewee interaction. In the Fresh Stories project multimodal pedagogies were implemented in a range of school classrooms with the view to:

*...unleash creativity and agency in learners and teachers in unexpected ways; recontextualise the representation of learners' identities; foreground issues of equity and value in relation to assessment practices and open up the third ground in the struggle between mainstream language and literacy practices and cultural difference (Stein and Newfield 2002:5).*

Using a multimodal process, I hoped to not only elicit richer, more insightful data but also to provide the group with some kind of creative outlet for issues that might not otherwise be expressed. For these reasons I decided to mix the techniques of data collection. I set up semi-structured interviews which would be transcribed, recorded observations in field notes and then encouraged the group to work on a collaborative project, in the form of a performance, which would be carried over a number of weeks and presented to an audience of their choice.

The group that volunteered to work with me was made up of six black, Zulu speaking grade sevens, three boys and three girls. Most were thirteen years old but two were still twelve. All had been at the school since grade one and all considered Zulu to be their primary language.

The sessions were largely conducted in English, partly because I was facilitating the process and partly, it seemed, because the sessions were taking place at school where English predominates. I had stated that the participants could converse in whatever language they chose but I was aware that because an English speaking adult was making that statement, meant that it was probably discounted. There is no doubt that my status as a white, English-speaking teacher/researcher determined, to a large extent, the data that I elicited. To attain an even fuller understanding of the situation would have required the addition of similar sessions conducted by black, Zulu speaking researchers where the group could perhaps speak more openly about their feelings for white English speaking people. I do believe though that I was given

access to thoughts and feelings about black and Zulu speaking people that perhaps the participants would not have felt comfortable sharing with a Zulu speaker but at the same time, I am certain that the reverse is also true. Due to the relatively small scale of this project and time constraints, resources were accordingly limited and I had to rely on the hope that by emphasizing my loyalty to the group over the school, they would trust me to keep their views and opinions of their teachers and friends confidential.

It became apparent later that the participants rarely, if ever, spoke about the conflicts involved in their identities. No space was given for this type of discussion at school and little talk of this kind took place amongst themselves. After the study one participant, Pumzile, revealed that, through talking openly with the others, she had discovered she was not alone:

*Phumzile: Maybe I thought I was the only one and now I can see that it's not only me, most of the people are like that.*

*(Post performance video interview)*

The most significant event for the participants was the collaborative exercise. I had made it clear that they could choose any mode of expression, whether it be some kind of artefact that they made together or something that they wrote, sang, danced or acted. When it was first discussed, the group reached a unanimous decision to put together some kind of theatrical performance which they would then present to their friends, parents and a few teachers (Alborough 2002). This was set in motion during the third week of the study.

I was more than a little apprehensive about the idea of a performance. I would have much preferred a big painting or a sculpture that would not literally shout the experiences of the group. In spite of this, I knew that children this age love the idea of performing and would jump at the chance to perform on stage.

Certain themes had begun to emerge in the discussion sessions and the drama was divided into four domains where their experience of speaking isiZulu and English takes place: a traditionally rural scene, a school classroom, a home scene and lastly,

an urban scene. The students informally 'scripted' and choreographed the scenes and thrashed out ideas of structure which were negotiated by the group and then put in place. The group chose to present their performance to the grade six and seven classes with their teachers. They had also invited their parents though showing it in school time meant that most parents were at work.

In 2004, having already collected the primary data source in the form of the performance, I returned to the participants nearly two years later to find out how relevant the representations in the performance still were. The discussion, much like the initial interviews, was semi-structured with free-flowing discussion rather than a sequence of questions and answers. The final corpus of data therefore included the performance text, field notes, 2002 interview transcripts and the 2004 interview transcripts.

For the purposes of this paper I have chosen to look closely at just one of the five scenes in order to show how the analysis process took place. The School scene best shows the use of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar (1996) and illustrates the complexity of interaction between people in any single moment.

### **Analysing the School scene**

Below is the transcription of the School scene as it appeared in the performance.

*[Noma and Pumzile step up to the front.]*

Noma: At school I don't take any notice of the other kids because I don't care what they think or say about how I look and my culture.

Pumzile: At school some people understand because they are also coconuts.

Noma: A coconut. It is when you are black on the outside and white on the inside, *[in a Zulu accent]* coconut.

Pumzile: We need proper Zulu lessons because sometimes when I try speak Zulu, I muddle up my words.

*[They turn and walk towards the back of the stage. The 5 students are sitting facing the audience with the teacher on the left hand side. The teacher and one student, Nandi, who is sitting three from the right, are wearing white T shirts signifying that they are the outsiders in the class, both of them speaking predominantly English, while the rest of the class are*

wearing black T shirts signifying that they are the insider group, speaking predominantly isiZulu]

Minnie: Good morning class!

*[The 5 students stand up while one boy, Siphso, stands to the side]*

Students: Good morning ma'am

*[The students sit down]*

Minnie: Today we have a new student.

*[Siphso, standing on the side comes forward and Bonga and Noma mutter something to each other. Na is sitting upright in her chair while the two speak across her. She says in English]*

Nandi: Please don't speak Zulu.

*[The two look at her in disgust and exclaim]*

Noma: Haauw we!

*[The teacher continues oblivious to the exchange and addresses the new boy]*

Minnie: What's your name child?

Siphso: Sivukile

Minnie: What Zib'yile?

Siphso: *[slowly enunciating]* No Sivukile

Minnie: Well I'll just call you Vuki.

Siphso: *[protesting]* No, maam...

*[The teacher waves off the objection and ushers him to a seat]*

Nandi: Hello Vuki!

*[The students turn on her and admonish her]*

Others : Musa ukuphapha! (Don't be too friendly!)

Minnie: Noma, go and say hello.

*[Noma gets up from her chair and crosses the stage and shakes Siphso's hand, finding that he shakes it in a traditional way. She turns to Bonga, laughing at the new boy and slaps Bonga's outheld hand]*

Noma: (unclear)

*[The teacher hears this exchange, turns to them and bursts out]*

Minnie: Excuse me! Don't you dare speak Zulu in my class, this is an English school!

*[Bonga leans across Nandi and mutters something in isiZulu to Noma and Nandi, sitting between them, says to the teacher]*

Nandi: Miss, they're back-chatting you Miss, I don't know what they're saying but they're back-chatting you.

*[All the students turn to her with Noma pointing her finger in an accusing way and says]*

Noma: Mus' ukugcina wena!(don't be such a busybody!)

Minnie: Noma, Bonga, bring me your homework books

*[Bonga and Noma get up with Noma saying to Nandi]*

Noma: Musa ukungijwayela kabi (do not get too friendly with me)

*[They go to the teacher, extending their arms with their hands on forearms in a gesture of respect. Nandi not understanding the tradition asks]*

Nandi: What's up with the hand?

*[Noma answers aggressively]*

Noma: Inhlonipho (It shows respect)

*[The bell rings and the students get up, walking to the right of the stage. Nandi approaches the others]*

Nandi: Would you like to...

*[The rest of the students ignore her and raise their arms in a shunning gesture and Na walks to the left of the stage, loudly crying in an exaggerated way, making the audience laugh.]*

(Video Transcription 2002)

This study worked with the New London Group's (2000) suggestion that there are five modes of meaning: the linguistic mode, the visual, the audio, the spatial and the gestural mode. The notion of multimodality can be defined as referring to meanings that are expressed through these multiple modes simultaneously. An important aim of this project was to explore modes that are not usually given as much attention in the education and applied linguistic fields as is given to the study of language as the primary mode of communicating meaning. Initially I sought to explore the nature of multimodality through the data collection process to investigate its use for pedagogical purposes. I was not aware how significant the notion of multimodality was going to be for the entire research process, from data collection in the form of creating a performance, through the analysis of the data which required the use of photographs, sketches and listening to music, to the very end point of this printed document that presents the data in the form of photographs, sketches and language.

That the participants chose to construct a performance meant that they were making use of their voices, their bodies, their clothes, their songs, their languages and their music to tell stories about themselves. It meant that they drew from all manner of resources to create the performance text, including their experiences of school, their relationships with teachers, parents, grandparents and friends. They also drew from the popular Discourses of hip hop music and 'gangsta' style clothing to express their

adolescent wish to follow and identify with music and fashion trends. The group also drew from their histories, from their understandings of what traditional Zulu culture is about and their notions of the historical position that black South Africans have had to take in relation to the Colonial presence of white South Africans. From all these available resources, amongst many others, the group designed a performance that represented who they thought they were. The key to the richness of the performance was its multimodal nature.

The School scene, focussed on in this paper, is short, with the most overt story being a scenario with an English teacher and a new boy arriving in the class. The boy is from a rural area and still observes many of the traditional practices of greetings and gestures of respect. The teacher can not pronounce the boy's Zulu name and so abbreviates it to an anglicized nick-name. This and the way their names are pronounced by teachers were issues that had come up in the pre-performance discussions. Below is an extract from the transcripts of the sessions prior to the performance. For reasons of confidentiality, the speakers in this case have not been named.

*Speaker 1*        *What's your name and she'll say like "Nana" and I'll say like "Nuhnuh"*

*Speaker 2*        *and they're like "Nanna" and I'm like "no, that's not my name"*

*Speaker 3*        *"Oh what's your name?"*

*"Nomagugu"*

*"oh, Nomagoogoo"*

*(Transcript 2, 2002:1)*

I had noticed, when working in the school, that some teachers had not been prepared to learn their students' Zulu names and so made up names that they could pronounce. The children had wanted to make a statement about this in the performance and did so, the result being provocatively direct. There is also the issue of eye-contact. The teacher demands that the boy looks at her when she is talking even though he is actually showing her respect by avoiding eye-contact. Though this is the most obvious story, I would like to suggest that there are more subtle stories playing out through the scene that are as illustrative as the surface plot, perhaps even more so.

One of these more subtle threads is the interaction between the majority of the class members and a 'Model C' character. The larger group are openly hostile towards 'coconuts', black students who are 'black on the outside and white on the inside'; who have 'sold out' and deliberately associated themselves with English/whiteness. This is very interesting because one would expect, as it is an ex-'Model C' school being represented, that the black students would be likely to identify and sympathise with being called 'Model C's'. Indeed, when the group constructed the scene one of the primary intentions was to pick up again on the difference between urban and rural practices but in the context of an ex-model C school where the rural Zulu character would be the outsider and the 'Model Cs' would be the insider group. Instead, in the performing of the story, one character is clearly set apart as the 'Model C' while the others rally around the new boy from a traditional Zulu background. This preference for the new boy over the 'Model C' would seem to suggest that the participants possibly view traditional practice as being more desirable than 'Model C' status, even if the children are themselves identified by others as 'Model C's'.

My focal question for the research asks how the Discourses and identities of the participants are represented through the performance. It was a primary intention of the project to apply a social semiotic analysis and explore the multimodal nature of the data. The way that I chose to do this was through sampling critical moments from the video and then applying various methods of analysis to each moment. These methods included a textual analysis of the video transcript, mapping the audience response onto this transcript and using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar (1996) to analyse still frames from the video. Each of these methods will be discussed more fully below.

The beginning stage of my analysis was the sample selection from the large body of data. Some researchers code the whole corpus thematically (Fairclough 1992) but I chose instead to sample critical moments from the performance. Because the performance is so clearly structured into scenes, representing social domains, it seemed sensible to sample a moment from each scene in order to cover the whole performance. Regarding this problem, Fairclough suggests that "samples should be carefully selected on the basis of a preliminary survey of the corpus...so that they yield as much insight as possible into the contribution of discourse to the social

practice under scrutiny” (1992:230). How one judges whether a particular sample provides the best insight possible is a highly subjective process. To select the critical moments in the performance I surveyed the entire performance and identified points that I thought captured an essence of conflict, a point where “aspects of practice which might normally be naturalized, and therefore difficult to notice” (Fairclough 1992:230) are made visible.

### **The Linguistic Mode**

The School scene is relatively static, with the participants remaining seated for most of the scene. When gestures are used, they involve facial expression or the use of arms and hands rather than whole bodies as expression. The linguistic mode dominates expression in this scene and this makes sense because schools are where western middle class practices are dominant.

This particular critical moment was chosen from the rest of the scene because it captures a junction between the more subtle narrative threads. In this moment the interaction between teacher and students, between the `Model C' character and the insider group and between teacher and `Model C' are all evident. The teacher who is the official authority in the class demands that only English be spoken in the class. What emerges in this moment is that not only is her demand not met, it appears that her authority in general is deliberately subverted by members of the class. English is far from being the only language spoken in the class; in fact the dominance of all things associated with English is brought into question.

*Minnie (TEACHER): Excuse me! Don't you dare speak Zulu in my class, this is an English school!*

*[One of the students leans across the `Model C' character and mutters something to another classmate. The `Model C', sitting between them says to the teacher:]*

*Nandi (`MODEL C'): Miss, they're back-chatting you Miss, I don't know what they're saying but they're back-chatting you. [All the students turn to her with one pointing her finger in an accusing way and saying]*

*Noma (INSIDER): Mus' ukuqina wena! (Don't be such a busybody)*

*(Video Transcript 2002:5)*



**Figure 1. “Miss, they're back-chatting you Miss, I don't know what they're saying but they're back-chatting you”**

The teacher character that appears in the School scene was constructed as a fictional character though the children drew on their experience of some teachers in the school to create this character. The teacher's command that only English be spoken had actually been heard from a teacher in the school. The teacher who had been heard to say this was sitting in the audience on the day of the performance, making the statement highly charged, particularly when openly disobeyed in the performance through a muttered response in isiZulu.

As I combed systematically through the text of each critical moment, I superimposed the audience response on to the actors' dialogue. This allowed me, an outsider to the social practices associated with being Zulu and black in an ex-Model C school, to isolate comments that signalled issues for the insider audience. Loud laughter from the audience, for example, signalled a joke or something daring and I would then look more closely at that particular feature. The reaction from black students in the audience during this particular critical moment was not laughter or clapping as in other moments but an intense low level murmur of response to the provocation of the students deliberately ignoring the teacher, as if in recognition of the experience and of the boldness to openly declare it a parody in front of teachers.

An interaction that is barely noticeable to the viewer but significant to this discussion is one where the students comment on the teacher in isiZulu after she has rebuked the class for speaking Zulu. They are then reported by the `Model C' character played by

Nandi, “Miss they're back-chatting you Miss”. This ‘Model C’ character is overplayed by Nandi who, during the pre-performance discussions, was outspoken about alleged ‘Model C’s’ in the school. She dramatizes the character’s weakness and tale-telling to the point of making her ‘Model C’ character a joke. She is acting the betrayer and revealing a rather harsh judgment of this character type. Her next words raise much in this regard: “I don’t know what they’re saying but they’re back-chatting you”. Here the character declares her distance from the insider group through her lack of Zulu knowledge and her white English accent, her reliance on English and her allegiance to the white teacher. The others’ response is for all, including the new boy, to turn to her, with the student closest raising her finger in accusation and warning her about getting involved in things that do not concern her. This is important because it places significant distance between the group and the ‘Model C’ character. The group is, in effect, telling her that issues of ‘Zuluness’, and ‘blackness’ do not concern her because in their eyes she is neither Zulu nor black. It is a harsh judgement on the character, denying membership to her culture and race (See figure 2).



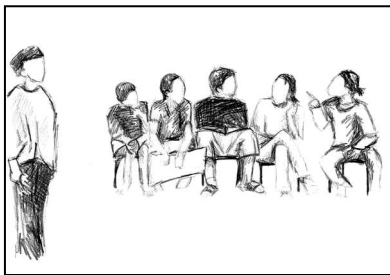
**Figure 2. Shunning the ‘Model C’**

### **The Visual Mode**

Because the project is concerned with multimodal texts, it was important to extend the analysis beyond the language used and look at other modes. This I attempted through a elements of Kress and van Leeuwen’s framework of social semiotic analysis, outlined in their book *Reading Images* (1996). In this book Kress and van Leeuwen describe a grammar for visual images which provides grammatical terminology and grammatical structures for visual images, much like the grammatical features used in

language. When applied to images the grammatical features can provide insight into how participants in the image relate to each other. In this study, this is done firstly through the participants' actions; these are called Action Processes in visual grammar. The second feature that this study uses is the way participants position themselves relative to each other in the frame and relative to the viewer; this is called the Horizontal Angle. The third way this study uses visual grammar to gain insight is through the participants' gaze, called Reactional Processes. Analysing how participants relate to each other is a primary aim of the study because insight into interaction allows the researcher to access the values and practices that different groups' membership is evaluated by. These practices and values can then point to the Discourses that are at work.

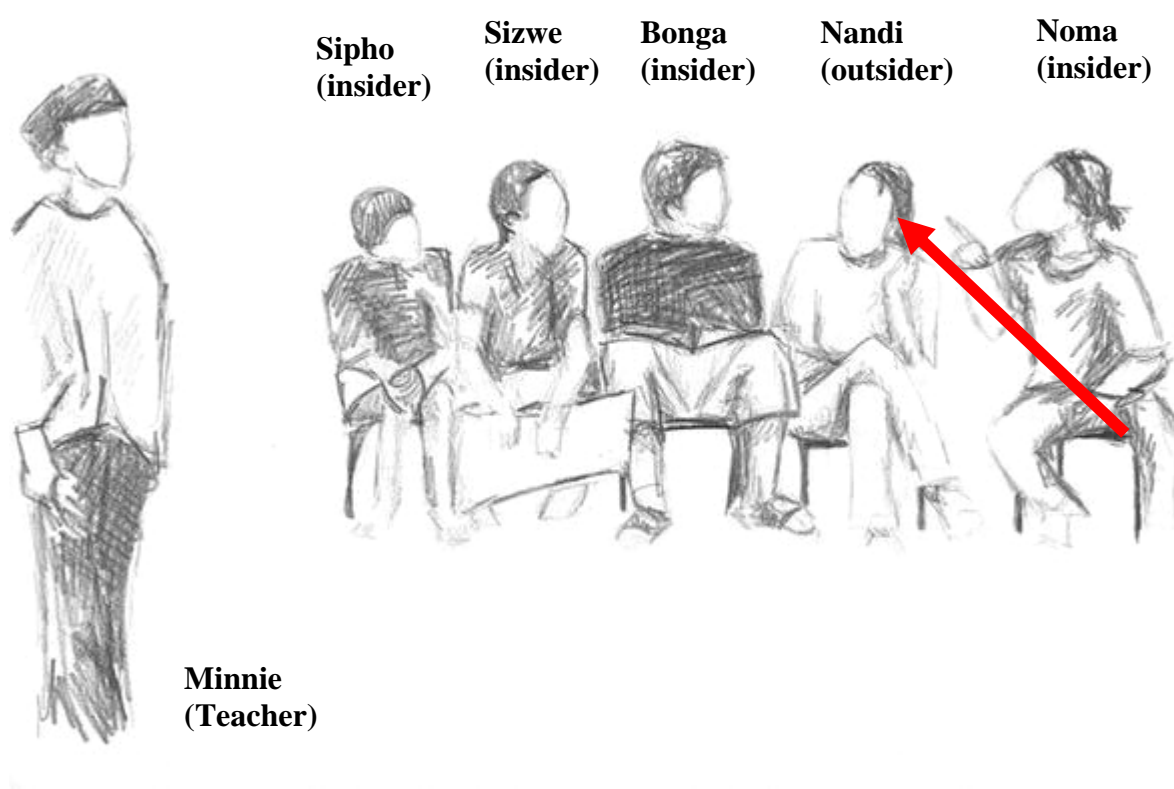
In order to begin this analysis I needed to translate the video into still images which could be analysed. I decided to produce sketches at particular points in the critical moments. These I executed in pencil on white paper (see figure 3.). Having done a range of sketches I then chose the clearest, scanned them into a digital format and analysed them according to Kress and van Leeuwen's grammatical features (1996). When I eventually managed to capture still photographs from the video, I found that they were not as useful as the sketches; because they were taken from a moving image most were too blurred to be useful for close analysis.



**Figure 3. Example of Sketch**

The act of sketching was of great value to the interpretive process. Having decided which critical moments to focus on, I had to watch these short moments and select a few frames that somehow captured what I thought the moment was about. This was a highly subjective act because it meant that I was selecting according to my impression of the moment before I had officially begun to analyse the moment. I selected frames that included the focal participants of the moment, for example the School scene

needed to include all the participants (see figure 3.). In doing this I was excluding other moments and other participants who were off stage. I also selected the frames according to whether they captured an action or an interaction that I thought was significant, for example in the School scene (see figure 3.) I chose frames where an actor in the scene was pointing her finger at another participant signalling, what I interpreted as, a sense of threat. This means that I deliberately chose scenes that were going to yield the kind of information I wanted, making the process very subjective. Another interpretive implication of the sketches is that the participants are without faces and are in black and white, this meant that I had to use the corresponding photographs to add meaning through colour and detail. The sketching process was important because it involved a number of interpretive choices which had the combined result of narrowing the focus of analysis.



**Figure 4. Action Processes: “Mus' ukugcina wena!”(don't be such a busybody!)**

The participants are represented in these sketches as *doing* something. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:56), refer to such images as narrative patterns because they “serve to

present unfolding actions and events, processes of change and transitory spatial arrangements”. Narrative processes can be separated according to “the kinds of vector and the number and kind of participants involved” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996:61). One type of narrative process is an action process which includes a participant as the Actor instigating an action and a participant as the goal receiving that action (See figure 4). The action itself is represented by a vector which most often takes the form of a diagonal line.

These vectors can follow the line of a pointing arm or a bent leg, or even inanimate features such as a winding road. What is important to note is that a vector indicates an action that in written language would be expressed by a verb. If there is an action process present in the picture, then it is most likely instigated by a participant and directed to another participant. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) call these participants Actor and Goal respectively. Which participant the actor is, is often determined by being the most salient participant, by their size or by their place in the composition (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996:61). To distinguish between Kress and van Leeuwen's Actor and the more general use of the term in reference to a dramatic actor, the former will have an uppercase A to signal Kress and van Leeuwen's specific use of the term. The composition of this particular moment seems to signal much that might seem obvious in the corresponding linguistic mode but is perhaps not so readily accessible through the visual mode (See figure 4.).

The teacher stands to the left of the frame, clearly separated from the class by distance but also by relative size. We have learned, through an acquired understanding of reading from and writing on paper, that even though the two dimensional plane of paper shows her to be larger than the others, her relative size works in the three dimensional plane and signifies her distance from the viewer relative to the distance between the others and the viewer. The teacher stands closest to the viewer and therefore, from the perspective of the viewer, she is larger than the others. This positioning in the three dimensional plane relative to the others isolates her. Another isolating feature is that she is not part of the tightly knit group of actors representing school children. She, as the teacher, must stand while the others sit meaning that she is alone while the others talk to each other.

There are numerous vectors in figure 4. though the most significant action process occurring in this picture is the one involving Noma and Nandi. Of the children sitting together Noma is the only one not touching or seeming to overlap with anyone else. She is also the only one of the group making an obvious movement. Both of these features make her the most salient figure in the drawing even though the teacher is the closest to the viewer. A strong vector can be seen following a diagonal line from Noma's knee and along her forearm towards Nandi. This diagonal is also echoed by the parallel lines formed by her bent leg, her bent left arm and by Nandi's crossed leg. Because the vector is directed by Noma, she is the Actor and because the vector is directed to Nandi, she is the Goal. If this action process were to be expressed in linguistic terms, it would take the form of something like 'Noma rebukes Nandi', where Noma is the subject and Nandi the object. Though the interpretation of the drawing may seem to be common sense, it is important to explore the meaning carried through the other modes and find interesting points of correlation or departure. In this particular case the reading of the visual mode corroborates that of the linguistic mode through the spoken dialogue.

### **The Spatial Mode**

The spatial mode is interestingly used in the performance. An analysis of the way the actors use the stage space is interesting in itself but it also allows insight into the shifting relationship between the actors and the characters they play. Pavis (1996: 58) describes the actor as someone who creates, through his or her body, appearance, voice and emotions, an entrance for the audience into a represented world where every action is read as a fictional action that only has real meaning within that represented world. At the same time however, the actor is also his/herself, an actor whose skill or appearance can be evaluated by the audience. They therefore have dual status. They are simultaneously real actors and imaginary characters (Pavis 1996:59). In this particular performance the situation is more complex than a straight forward theatrical play. The actors produced the performance, created characters and enacted situations that express their own experience making it very difficult to identify whether the actors are playing real people or playing fictional characters. One way of looking more closely at this issue is to examine the actors' use of actual and represented space through the performance.

The term *actual space* refers to the stage. In reality the stage was the front of a school hall. The actors had marked, with masking tape, four different areas and they moved across the stage into a new area with the start of a new scene. The term *represented* refers to the imaginary place in which each scene is set. Because there were no backdrops used in the performance, the represented space was suggested through clues found in the way actors moved, the sounds they made or by the context of the interaction.

The School scene has the closest relationship between actual and represented space because the scene is set in a represented classroom while the actual space of the stage placed in a school hall is probably only a few metres from the real classroom that the actors are attempting to portray. In this scene the students sit on actual school chairs (see figure 5), a further link between the two worlds.

It could be argued that the participants are using this shifting between actual and represented states to allow expression of issues that are too sensitive to talk about openly in 'real time'. It would not be possible for the participants to stand up in front of a collection of teachers and speak as themselves about injustice in the classroom. The represented space allows them to be someone else, someone else who is not real and therefore can not be held responsible for what is expressed. Complicated issues seem to be playing out simultaneously through this performance and are allowed to because the act of performing is too complex a thing for the audience to successfully unravel what is real and what is fictional.



**Figure 5. Real School chairs**

The multimodal findings of this research process have significant implications for pedagogy. The study opened a space for the participants to freely express themselves that was only possible because they could use multiple modes to tell stories that would have been drastically reduced if they had been restricted to the sole use of the linguistic mode. Dancing, singing, clapping, shouting and pushing can only be shallowly described through language, not fully embodied. The participants' stories would have been very different if they had simply been spoken rather than enacted. This raises the question, how much of learners' voices are actually heard in schools? In what moments can learners really express what they think, feel, remember and believe? They do 'creative' writing where they are given subjects to write about. They do art where they are given subjects to paint. They do orals where they are given subjects to talk about in front of the class. They do music where they are given songs to read and sing. In what moments can learners choose what to say, how to say it and who to say it to? I would like to suggest that these moments need to be opened up for children in schools, where they can design their own expression, choosing from multiple modes to say best what they want to say.

Multimodal processes have significant implications for research analysis. It was through multimodal techniques that this study managed to access particular meanings being expressed through modes other than language. In analysing still images from the performance it was possible, using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar (1996), to look at the way participants used their bodies to express meanings. Being able to layer additional meaning on to the participants' language meant that the data was enriched.

### **Layers of Discourse**

The School scene is complex because there are layers of Discourse at work at a number of levels through multiple modes. A Discourse, is "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful role" (Gee 1996a:131). Gee uses the uppercase 'D' to signal the extension of the concept from a more sociolinguistic definition referring simply to a single

instance of language (Pennycook 1996:115). So a Discourse (uppercase 'D') will be carried by a number of modes. For example, a Discourse of being a young, black, urban South African might include the meanings carried by the linguistic mode; code-switching between English and an African language, as well as meanings carried by wearing baseball caps and shirts with American labels, listening to RNB, House and Hip-Hop and even by playing basketball. So it is through multiple modes that meanings are carried which might collectively signal a particular Discourse.

According to Gee, all people “become members of one Discourse free” (Gee 1990:150). We are born into a community of intimates in which we acquire ways of being, of “thinking, feeling, valuing and using our native language in face-to-face communication” (Gee 1990:150). All of this acquisition or socialization is taking place within a certain context and can be called our initial Discourse, our primary Discourse, which marks us as belonging to a community of people who are alike. This Discourse forms a frame through which all other secondary Discourses will be acquired, a frame that will shape the new secondary Discourse to a degree but at the same time, be changed by the inclusion of the new Discourse. This would seem to indicate then that no Discourse remains static because they are constantly being re-shaped by new, different Discourses.

Secondary Discourses are developed in places where one is in contact with people who are outside of the intimate 'family' community. These places Gee calls secondary institutions (1990:151) and could take the form of a school, church or a work environment but it would seem that a secondary institution need not be so formally defined, especially when most societies are far from being homogenous.

In this School scene the first layer of Discourse is represented by the teacher who could be seen as symbolizing the broader school institution. This would involve what Gee would call a “school-based dominant Discourse” (Gee 1996a:146) which, in many South African ex-Model C schools, descend from western, pedagogic, white, middle class Discourses. Heath's work (1988) explores the experience of children whose primary Discourse correspond with this school based Discourse suffer far less conflict between Discourses than those children who come from very different cultural and language backgrounds. The children in this school scene come from Zulu

speaking, historically disadvantaged backgrounds and seem to experience much conflict between their primary or home Discourse and the dominant Discourse of school. Consequently, the teacher shown in this scene exhibits the lack of recognition of the students' cultural practices and a refusal to acknowledge the place of their language in the classroom.

Interestingly though the students react to the teacher, and perhaps symbolically to the dominant Discourse of school, with subversion of her official authority by deliberately disregarding her command for English only. The fact that they are actually presenting such a performance to an audience made up of school students and teachers is also a public challenge to the usually unquestioned authority of the school system.

Another level of Discourse is also dominant but is different to the dominance of the school Discourse because it operates at the level of classroom peers. The in-group represented in this scene have mastery in the Discourse of being urban, black and Zulu and certainly test the 'Model C' in the class, refusing her access to the group because she can not exhibit her Zuluness thereby betraying her allegiance to 'blackness' by being too white.

It is helpful to apply Bourdieu's model of symbolic capital to this situation and read the possible allocations of capital. Bourdieu uses a useful analogy of a 'market place' or a 'game' for social practices or an "economy of practice" (Carrington and Luke 1997:100). This economy is based on the premise that "all human activity, or practice, involves exchange between individuals and groups...which, in addition to direct currency flow, are the source of social power and control. All practice thus is directed, consciously or otherwise, at the maximisation of social advantage" (Carrington and Luke 1997:100). In order to wield power in this social marketplace, it is necessary to accumulate capital. In fact, according to Luke, "the distribution, availability and relationality of capital influences the chances for successful participation in the social structure" (1996:327). In Bourdieu's economy of practice different types of capital describe different ways of accumulating prestige and status. Embodied capital refers to the skills, practices and knowledges that are linked to use of the body through speaking, understanding, moving etc (Carrington and Luke 1997:102).

In this School scene, the 'Model C' can not exhibit the embodied capital accumulated through the linguistic practices (Carrington and Luke 1997) of knowing and speaking the 'proper' isiZulu that the insider group knows and speaks. She speaks more English than isiZulu and her English seems to have the accent of a native English while her isiZulu seems not to be that of a native speaker. This lack of embodied capital would presumably translate into a lack of "prestige, status and reputation" (Carrington and Luke 1997:103) and would therefore exclude her from the group.

Interestingly though, there are benefits of speaking English with a native accent, particularly in a school whose teachers are predominantly white, native English speakers. Speaking 'fluent' English, that is with the accent of native speakers, would presumably translate into other forms of capital. It might mean that better results are attained in official school tests and it might mean that a relationship with the teacher is better, translating into some kind of academic reward; perhaps institutional capital would be accumulated more easily. This possible 'spin off' for the 'Model C' confirms that the accumulation of capital is dependent on the social field. The capital, to be capital, has to be legitimated by an authority in that social field. It must be "in some way officially 'deemed' to be of value" (Carrington and Luke 1997:103).

It soon becomes clear that it is not just the Discourses that are important but also the way in which the Discourses interrelate. How the Discourses work or conflict with each other seemed to be primarily dependent on the actual and represented social field (Bourdieu 1990), the context in which the action was taking place. When one thinks of dominant Discourses, one usually thinks of the 'super' hegemonic Discourses of large institutions or systems. This category might include the dominant school based Discourse that, in South Africa, seems to still reflect white, English, middle class values and cultural practices. It emerges through the process of this research that the dominance of Discourses are not consistent; the hegemony of the school Discourse, for example, though represented at one point in the performance, does not retain its superordinate position. The dominance of a Discourse seems rather to be dependent on the field in which it is located. In the classroom, the teacher represents the school based Discourse and this gives her official authority over the students. However, though the Discourse of school may be powerful, the students might hold the Discourse of being urban and the Discourse of traditional Zulu higher than that of the

school based Discourse. They might subvert the teacher's authority by deliberately ignoring the rules of school and speaking isiZulu even though she has demanded English only. Here the teacher's field coexists, be it in conflict, with the student's field and different Discourses dominate in each. At another level, a peer level, another conflict between Discourses is taking place. The in-group hold the Discourse of being 'real' Zulus and the outsider, the 'Model C', holds the Discourse of being urban and English. In the field of the in-group, their Discourse is dominant and excludes the outsider from joining because she is a 'coconut'; she is white on the inside. However, recontextualise this conflict in the teacher's field and a very different picture emerges. In the teacher's field, the outsider will be the one to capitalise on her membership to the Discourse of being urban and English.

If the dominance of Discourses can indeed be linked to particular fields, then it is reasonable to suggest that no single Discourse is superordinate and there is no overall hierarchy of Discourses. Dominance depends on the field and on whether the particular Discourse has capital (Bourdieu 1990) in that field. To concur with Bourdieu and Luke's claims about the relational nature of power, this means then, that marginalised individuals are only marginalised in certain fields while in others where their Discourses are dominant, they hold power.

### **Multiple Identities**

When one thinks that the performance was created as a representation of the identities of the group of participants, the question is raised: which characters were fictional and which characters were real representations of the participants? The answer to this is as complex as the layers of Discourses working throughout the performance.

In the School scene the representations of the learners are complicated. There is the 'Model C' character who is exaggerated and played as a comic figure. This would seem to suggest that she is an undesirable character and that the participants would be more likely to identify with the insider group who are closely knit and scathing of the 'coconut'. Though the 'Model C' may be an undesirable identification does not preclude the possibility that participants might relate to her, even unwillingly. Minnie admits in the 2002 interviews that she feels inadequate in the townships where she is seen as a 'Model C'.

*Minnie: I have like really big problems with that because me speaking Zulu, people look at me like...I don't speak Zulu well at all so when I go there, I don't have much friends in S- but when I go there it's like difficult. Here, I'm talkative, very talkative but when I get there it's like I'm actually quiet. You know, I just keep to myself because I can't say much. I try not to say much because I know I'll say something wrong*

*(Transcript 1, 2002:10)*

At the same time however, the in-group in the scene seem to view the Discourse of being Zulu to be of great value, as if the attached practices signal the historical legacy of Zuluness that is worthy of pride and respect. This sentiment is reflected in the comment by Minnie in one of the 2002 interviews.

*Minnie: My mom says no matter who you are, tradition is part of you. Culture is part of you. You can go to white schools, you can have the most education, I mean believing (we're Christians but we still have our traditional ways) and we can't leave those things behind. They're part of us.*

*(Transcript 1, 2002:5)*

Because the participants are moving in multiple social fields and acting through multiple Discourses they can be said to hold multiple identities. Each identity perhaps is more strongly, but not exclusively, associated with certain fields and therefore certain Discourses. This is not to say that these participants are abnormal but rather that they are like millions of people living in multicultural, multilingual communities. They are living rich, diverse lives. They are living through multiple identities, constantly and fluidly meshing their urban selves with their Zulu selves, their English selves with their black selves, their histories with their present selves. In a complex, shifting way then, the participants, through their use of a multitude of resources, are constantly designing and redesigning their own identities (Cope and Kalantzis 2000). The question then arises, why do this study? Why not leave children to live this rich, diverse life uninterrupted? The problem is that western ideology strongly espouses the notion of one 'true self' (Barker 1999, Billington et al. 1998, Mackay and Wong 1996). With forces of globalisation collapsing the boundaries between societies, there are appearing more and more interfaces like the one described in this study where western, Eurocentric school systems and western popular Discourses meet children

from very different histories. It seems reasonable then to suggest that the values and ideologies attached to those Discourses might well be taken up by children participating in western Discourses. If that is the case, is it not possible that children such as the participants in this study might really believe that they are supposed to have one 'true' self? I would like to suggest that children, not just children who are marginalised in schools but all children, need to think consciously about their lives and about pressures they are facing. They need to be given open opportunities to talk about who they are, where they come from, what they believe, what they think and what they feel. In addition to this, I believe that children need to believe that the way they are is acknowledged and affirmed; they need to know that they are taken seriously by people in authority over them.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to outline the qualitative and interactive process of the research study that culminated in a multimodal performance constructed and performed by the participants. It has aimed to focus on a particular scene in the performance in order to illustrate the methods of analysis used while also interweaving the main theoretical concepts with the primary findings of the study.

A primary feature of the study was to make use of multimodal methods in the data gathering stage and in the analysis process, through linguistic, visual and spatial analysis, but also to use multimodality as a key theoretical concept in the understanding of how people carry Discourses and communicate their identities.

Along with multimodality, the idea of layers of Discourse and multiple identities were then brought into focus as notions that have also attained prominence through the research process. The common feature to all three is that all have highlighted the agency of the participants. It was through multimodality that the participants were able to express their stories in powerful ways. The idea that Discourses are layered in changing hierarchies which are dependent on the social field means that the participants are not subject to the hegemony of dominant Discourses but rather that they hold power in fields where *their* Discourses are dominant. Lastly, the notion of multiple identities acknowledges that, contrary to western ideology, because people

are involved in multiple social fields, they have multiple identities. This is a release from the ethnocentric compulsion to have simple, single identities. This means that people who do not comply, like the participants in the research, are not failures but people who have complex, vividly rich lives.

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