

**Heidi Lindberg Augestad**

Does education make a difference?

*An exploration of education and gender in a  
South African context*



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## Abstract

This thesis examines the role of education in the process of transforming gender norms in marginalized societies, based on a study in a South African township. Education is understood as a crucial tool when societies initiate social and political change, but needs to be critically viewed on whether efforts in fact challenge practices, culturally and socially, that are gender insensitive. The tendency of understanding gender equality as numerical equality has dominated how national and international policy on gender has been outlined, and despite all efforts, reaching social and political justice and empowerment for women seems to be a slow process.

Two main focuses come out of the study reported in this thesis. First, there is a gap between modern gender discourses, on the one hand, which form the school's efforts and approaches and traditional gender practices, on the other hand. Secondly, in disadvantaged societies and societies in conflict education there is a need to involve a more sensitive approach towards people's realities and pragmatic choices in order to "live out" the potential of education as a counterforce on unjust practices.

The capability approach and social construct theory will serve as the theoretical orientation for this thesis and together they offer a conceptual structure in order to understand how education, gender and development may be related.

Key words:

Marginalised societies, gender, education, capabilities, development, counterforce

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## Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
DAW	Division for the Advancement for Women (United Nations)
DoE	Department of Education
EFA	Education for All
GAD	Gender and Development
GEEP	Gender Equality, Education and Poverty
GETT	Gender Equity Task Team
HCDS	Human Capital Development Strategy
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus/Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MIE	Multicultural and International Education
NUFU	Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
SAT	Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial
STI	Sexually Transferred Infections
TB	Tuberculoses
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WID	Women in Development
WCED	Western Cape Education Department



# 1. Introduction

## **Are we freed or really doomed?**

*Poverty is ravaging all corners of our society  
Unemployment is rife with no amnesty  
Most of us are still subject to servitude  
Obedient to that bloke who got attitude  
Our degrees and diplomas are gradually  
becoming useless*

*Young ladies at night are doing business  
Young boys are joining gangs  
Born today and in few years he is dead  
Are we really free or are we doomed?  
Maybe we once will be free to face the storm  
The storm of drugs, crime,  
unemployment, teenage pregnancy  
Aids, poverty and prostitution  
But today, I know that our freedom is just  
an illusion*

(Poem by Vumilo; diary, August 2009)

This poem brings forward some of the recurrent and cross-cutting themes of this study: a challenging life situation, the role of education and human freedom. In this thesis I attempt to explore the role of education as a promoter for gender equality and equity, recognizing equality between men and women as one key path to individual freedom as well as just and sustainable societies (UNFPA 2010).

The working title for this study: Does education make a difference? is rhetorical in its approach. I am not questioning whether education is important in a general sense; there are few doubts that education is a key to individual and societal progress. However, when we talk about education as an agent of change for gender equality and equity I think it is important to question whether the ideals and visions of education in fact are transferable to the context the students live in. Thus, the title has guided the process of this thesis as I have been searching for evidence of stumbling blocks, efforts and possible solutions in the complex relationship of education, gender and development.

It is a commonly agreed truth that education is a crucial element for improving the lives of people living in poverty, and that it contributes to social and economic development in society by improving health and life expectancy among people as well as encouraging entrepreneurship and increasing productivity (Colclough and Lewin, 1998, Subrahmanian 2005). Educated people contribute to a socio-economic development by being able to obtain new knowledge and skills and thereby transfer or utilize these into private and societal life. Education is thus strongly recognised as playing a vital role in forging national unity and in order to improve or change politics (DoE 2003a, Tikly 2004, UNESCO 2003, Walker 2007). Within the global discourse the role of education is expressed as follows:

(...) that all children, young people and adults have the human right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term, an education that includes learning to know, to do, to live together and to be. It is an education geared to tapping each individual's talents and potential and developing learners' personalities, so that they can improve their lives and transform their societies (UNESCO 2000, online).

This general aim of what role education shall play in people's lives; by meeting their needs, filling their abilities and thereby improve lives and transform societies points to the very heart and soul of education. However, what is also visible is that within regions, countries and places worldwide still many people find themselves in a continuing struggle over life which often is related to poverty, lack of access to education or to quality education, experiences of war and conflicts, political suppression or socio-cultural constraints, and often these factors are linked together (GEEP 2008). Schools that are situated within marginalised contexts often meet bigger challenges and resistance in order to fulfil their potential as agents of change. Such challenges may come from a lack of financial and material resources, lack of qualified teachers or from external factors such as socio-economic and cultural constraints in the community (UNESCO 2010a). Thus, it is easy to agree with Holmarsdottir (2006)<sup>1</sup> when she writes that "there is no clear path whereby education leads to an acceptable standard of life".

Gender equality is regarded as a cornerstone for development. The slogan "Empowering women and girls empowers us all" (UNFPA 2010, online) describes a core message in the

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<sup>1</sup> This article did not have page references.

global gender policy. This idea addresses the fact that girls and women throughout the world are persistently facing severe forms of discrimination such as gender based discrimination and violence, economic discrimination as well as harmful traditional practices (UNFPA 2010). Gender inequalities remain a key issue and draw-back in the process of the development of many societies and the disparities between men and women are visible in many ways: women and children are adversely more affected by poverty, war and conflicts than men, women work longer hours and they are paid less than men and their choices, opportunities and participation in how they spend their time and resources are more constrained than they are for men (GEEP 2008, Nussbaum 2000, UNFPA 2000). These disparities create substantial gaps between how much women and men can contribute to the society and how much they are able to benefit from it.

Education is considered to be one of the main tools in order to address gender inequalities in the world and is promoted through the Millennium Development Goals as well as being a key target within the Education for All campaign (UNESCO 2000, 2009).

There is a powerful human rights argument and a strong developmental case for achieving gender equality in education. It is an affordable investment with high returns. When girls are educated, livelihoods are improved, education is valued, and civic responsibility is enhanced (UNESCO 2010b: online).

The gender focus within education has for a long time been on girls access to schools, the many obstacles they meet in order to be able to attend school as well as the challenges they face in order to accomplish their education. The importance of ensuring access and safe and proper education for all boys and girls is non-negotiable, and it points to important challenges and issues in marginalized societies. However, the trend within gender policy discourses, both on a global and national level, has to a large extent nourished a focus on gender equality as numerical parity, and by this turned gender equality in education into a “numbers game” (Fennel and Arnot 2008, Holmarsdottir, forthcoming, Walker and Unterhalter 2007). I attempt in this study to go behind the numbers by illuminating and comparing some of the values and practices in education to the values and practices in the community in order to find out whether gender equality in terms of acknowledgement of equal rights and mutual respect between genders can be appreciated and established.

Another growing concern within gender research in education is that it needs to be more receptive towards the various contextual settings education is performed in (Fennel and Arnot 2008). Gender relations, identities and roles are not produced and performed equally from place to place, but are influenced by complex and various factors such as culture, tradition, ethnicity, rural/urban settings and socio-economic circumstances (Momsen 2004). Thus there are deep-seated inequalities that hinder girls and women in having access to education or to utilize its potential. Western feminism seems to have dominated the global discourse with its understanding of gender based on the specific context it has evolved from, namely capitalist and liberal democratic societies (Fennel and Arnot 2008). The feminist rise in Western Europe and North America called for a specific political agenda that is not easily transferred to other social, cultural and economic contexts. African, Indian and Latin American feminists have for a long time challenged the Western feminist approach claiming that different historical trajectories creates different gender perceptions and relations (Mohanty 2004). Based on this view it is easy to agree with Fennel and Arnot (2008) when they emphasise the importance of a context-sensitive based understanding of gender in educational research:

If “global” gender scholarship is to take off, then gender education researchers need to be sensitive and attuned to the diverse educational forms that emerge in different national contexts and its implications for gender equality. This will require them to be skilled enough to identify the different discursive frameworks used by policy makers, politicians, teachers, students and communities and their impacts on educational provision, experience and outcomes (Fennell and Arnot 2008: 5).

A significant number of studies have described and explored the field of gender and education, and how these two issues are related (Arnot and Mac an Ghil 2006, Bhana 2005, Chisholm and September 2005, Fennel and Arnot 2008, Pandor 2005, Unterhalter 2004, 2007). Their work critically discusses how the concept of gender equality and equity is dealt with in education and how it can be implemented in marginalised societies in order to reach gender equality and human development. In addition it investigates what kind of obstacles and challenges that exist within societies that might influence educational policies, thus, arguing that contextual based gender research is crucial in order to understand the production and re-production of gender norms and practices.

What I find less approached in the literature is whether and how the school affects its communities, or in other words how the schools teaching of knowledge, skills and attitudes

related to gender are transferred to the social context. However, two studies have given illuminating perspectives on this issue. In Murphy Graham's article: *Constructing a new vision: Undoing gender through secondary education in Honduras* (2009) she presents results from a study in Honduras where students participated in an education programme that aimed to "undo gender". The students were encouraged to rethink gender relations in their everyday lives in a way that increased their consciousness of gender equality and heightened their desire for change in the domestic sphere. The programme had a practical approach to gender where the students and teachers engaged in dialogue and debates where they could critically reflect on their understanding of gender, and in addition, the programme emphasised that undoing gender requires change among individuals and in social structures such as the family (Murphy-Graham 2009).

Monisha Bajaj's article: *Un/doing gender? A case study of school policy and practice in Zambia* (2009) describes another approach to how education may contribute to a change in students gender perceptions. Her study examines how one alternative and private school in Zambia has attempted to resist and transform unequal gender relations through its educational policies, pedagogy and practices. Organizing the students separately by gender, the girls and the boys had to take responsibilities for each campus with the various tasks required such as cleaning, leading assemblies, organising activities, disregarding whether the tasks were gender defined. In this way the girls and the boys experienced building skills and experiences on a variety of jobs which they probably wouldn't have had the opportunity to do in the home. The findings of this study suggest that the pedagogical practices deployed by the school generally succeeded in destabilising norms of gender subordination and gender-based discrimination with the students.

These articles represent two different approaches on how education can address gender equality. They have been useful for this thesis as they represent concrete pedagogical efforts in the attempt of changing pre-dominant gender perceptions, thus, providing me with a practical "mirror" to view my own findings and the literature on this issue.

The stage for this study is set in a South African township characterised by vast socio-economic challenges in terms of unemployment and poverty together with a strong

traditional and cultural representation. The fieldwork took place in a primary school in the Township of Crossroads in Cape Town<sup>2</sup>, and is one out of four research schools that is part of the Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education (NUFU) project on Gender Equality, Equity and Poverty (GEEP), and which this thesis will contribute data to. The GEEP project is a network cooperation project between Oslo University College, Afhad University for Women in Khartoum and the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town. One of the main objectives for this project is to explore how education can be used to achieve empowerment and influence cultural practices that are gender insensitive. It is mainly within this frame I will contribute with the findings from my research.

## 1.1 Research questions

The purpose of this study is to offer a contribution to the understanding of how gender, education and development may connect. The task is here twofold. One, I attempt to explore how gender discourses are expressed and performed within a home/community context and a school context in a South African township, and two, discuss the role of education as an agent of change when it comes to promote gender equality and equity. The research questions that have guided the fieldwork, the analysis and the discussion of findings in this study are:

- *How is gender perceived and practiced in the home?*
- *How is gender perceived and practiced in the school?*
- *How are these gender discourses experienced by the respondents?*
- *How does the schools gender discourse affect the student's perceptions of their future?*

## 1.2 Limitations of the study

During the process of conducting fieldwork and writing this thesis certain limitations are of concern. Being a qualitative researcher means that the analysis of data has solely reflected

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<sup>2</sup> The school will be further presented in the methodology chapter

my own interpretations on the basis of the pile of knowledge and life experience I have carried when entering this study, and not necessarily can be acknowledged as the truth (Bryman 2004). The topics of this study, gender, education and development are comprehensive, and the prioritising that I have done along the way, in what data to emphasise, what theories to be included and conclusion to be drawn, are solely on my account.

Both I and the respondents had to speak in English which is our second language, and this may have caused a possible limitation for this study. Eventhough we all managed to express ourselves well during the interviews it is obvious that the use of a second language may have limited the access of information since important nuances; the taken-for-granted meanings that are well-known in our mother tongues may have been difficult to express in a second language.

In addition, I find that time constraints also limited this study. The fieldwork was limited to five weeks because of job and family responsibilities in Norway and even though I was well prepared and spent my time efficiently while in Cape Town, it was impossible to get as thorough insight in the very complex realities of the participants in this study, as I felt the need for. However, I believe that I was able to reveal some general images of the respondent's home- and school environments related to gender and education.

### 1.3 Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into 8 chapters. This chapter has aimed to introduce the study by showing some insight and significance of the main topics.

*Chapter 2* will present the research context with fact information, a brief historical view on apartheid and a description of education and gender in South Africa, currently.

*Chapter 3* will provide a systematic outline of the research methodology that was utilized in this study, while

*Chapter 4* will introduce the theoretical framework. The chapter is divided into three parts, the first aims to conceptualize gender for its use in this thesis, the second is an overview of social construction theory and the last part presents the capability theory. In

*Chapter 5* I attempt to describe how gender is perceived and performed in the home and community context in light of the social construct theory, while

*Chapter 6* describes the school's gender discourse through its policy and practices. Based on the findings in chapter five and six,

*Chapter 7* will tease out what may be challenges for the role of education as a promoter of gender equality and equity and will be discussed in relation to the capability approach. Lastly,

*Chapter 8* will sum up the main findings of this thesis in relation to the research questions.



## 2. A South African context

The Republic of South Africa covers the southern tip of the African continent splitting two oceans apart on its western and eastern coast, the South Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean. The country borders to Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Namibia in the north and in addition, South Africa contains two recently independent countries: Swaziland and Lesotho.



Figure 1: Map of South Africa (CIA, online)

The South African population counts approximately 49 million inhabitants today. The Africans make up 79.6% (38 million) of the total population and with more than three-quarters of the whole population the Africans are by far the largest group and also the most diverse in cultures and languages (South Africa 2010). The white population is estimated at 9.1% (4.3 million), the colored population makes up 8.9% (4.2 million) and the Indian/Asian population approximately 2.5% (1.2 million) (South Africa 2010).

When it comes to languages, South Africa has eleven official languages where nine of them are African languages. English is the main public language even though only approximately

8 percent of the population speaks this as their mother tongue, while isiZulu (23%) and isiXhosa (17%) are the largest language groups.

South Africa is a middle-income country with an emerging market compared to many of the other countries on the African continent. Some characteristics are the rich supply of natural resources and well-developed financial structures (with the 18th largest stock exchange in the world), legal systems, communications, energy production and a modern infrastructure which supports an efficient distribution of goods to the major urban centers such as Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban (CIA 2010).

However, South Africa is a country with extreme differences in incomes and wealth. Steady economic growth in the post-apartheid period has contributed to an avoidance of a dramatic decline in income poverty, but at the same time financial inequalities have increased across race, gender and location (World Bank 2010). Today South Africa is the world's second worst country when it comes to income inequalities with a Gini coefficient<sup>3</sup> on 65. This means that South Africa has a vast divide between the poorest and the richest when it comes to material and financial resources and challenges tied to urbanization, housing, employment, violence and health (Thompson 2001, UNDP 2010). Thus, the South African people still relate to the legacy of apartheid by the fact that the financial gap is divided along racial and ethnic lines. Social challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and even HIV/AIDS are highly represented by the African population compared to the other population groups, evolved as a consequence of an unequal distribution of resources and opportunities among people (Thompson 2001, World Bank 2010).

Important to mention in this context is the devastating level of HIV/AIDS prevalence in South Africa which is a major task for this country to overcome. Being the most affected country in the world, with 18 % of the adult population living with AIDS<sup>4</sup>, the country has to face enormous socio-economic effects related to increased mortality rates due to AIDS.

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<sup>3</sup> The Gini coefficient is explained as an index that "measures the degree of inequality in the distribution of family income in a country. The index is calculated from the Lorenz curve, in which cumulative family income is plotted against the number of families arranged from the poorest to the richest. (...) If income were distributed with perfect equality, the Lorenz curve would coincide with the 45 degree line and the index would be zero; if income were distributed with perfect inequality, the Lorenz curve would coincide with the horizontal axis and the right vertical axis and the index would be 100" (CIA 2010, online).

<sup>4</sup> In total 5.7 million is HIV infected in South Africa out from a population of 49 million (CIA, online)

Consequences like lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality, higher death rates, lower population growth rates, and changes in the distribution of population by age and sex might be more severe than would otherwise be expected (CIA, online). Thus, the disease affects every aspect of society, within the health- and education sector, the employment market and most challenging are the human costs of those that experience the loss of their closest family members, their security and stability in life (Cohen, n.d.).

The vast differences between affluent and marginalized areas are clearly visible in South Africa where you find marginalized townships and sparkling shopping centers next to each other or overcrowded rickies (minibuses) and flashy BMW's competing in the morning traffic. However, one of the most critical aspects of this divide is the high crime rate and level of violence that is characteristic for many of the urban townships which is not found in the affluent areas. The link to high unemployment and thereby a lack of income opportunities may be an important explanation to the high rates of robberies and assaults (DOSS 2007). Another explanation links to the heritage of the apartheid period where the majority of Africans were forced into disadvantaged and suppressed situations. According to Bauer and Taylor (2005) it is impossible to divide South Africa's present problems from its political, structural and historic past and that South Africans still face structural injustices linked to the old racial lines. The apartheid regime created a racial segregation system that deprived all non-white population groups of equal rights and opportunities in society, but most of all was the African population politically, socially, financially and culturally oppressed by the white regime. Today, treating people based on color is outlawed in South Africa, but in reality these racial lines are still present, verbally and in the sharing of resources and opportunities (DoE 2006, Thompson 2001).

South Africa is a unique country in particular because of its long and tragic history of apartheid which was one of the world's most oppressive regimes during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I believe that in order to understand the South African society today it is evident to know some of its past. Due to space limits for this thesis I will in the next section only be able to give a brief presentation of apartheid and some of its most characteristic features.

## 2.1 Segregation and deprivation

Whites just did not see Africa. They lived in it and they owned it. They tried to tame it and control it. But they never listened to Africa's music. They couldn't dance or celebrate. In their own harsh way they loved what they had created here, covering Africa with an imitation of Europe. In this world Africans were either servants or a nuisance to be criticized, even demonized (Dowden 2009: 389).

The term apartheid has its origin in the Afrikaan word for "apartness" and defines a long political tradition in South Africa (Africana, online). Being characteristic for the policy of the white settlements since 1652 in order to ensure power to the white population, apartheid first became formally legalized and exercised after 1948 when the National Party (primarily Afrikaner) won the election. The National Party started immediately to consolidate its power as a white rule by forcing out all non-whites as political representatives and by ensuring financial rules and regulations in favor of white businesses and banking institutions. In addition they appointed Afrikaners to all vital positions in the civil service, army, the police, as well as medical and legal professions (Thompson 2001).

Three core principles described the apartheid system. First, the population of South Africa was divided into four "racial groups"; White, Colored, Indian and African. Each group featured by its own inherent culture. Second, whites were entitled to have absolute control over the state, and third, the state was not obliged to provide facilities or security to the subordinate population groups (Thompson 2001).

The most appropriate way of keeping white control in South Africa was to ensure that whites were segregated from the other groups and the African population specifically. In 1950, apartheid, which until then had been a social custom, became formalized under law by the Population Registration Act (Beinart 1994). This act made the four racial groups definite and together with complementary laws such as the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Beinart 1994), which assigned the different groups to specific residential and business sections in the urban area, the African and Colored population were forcefully deprived their opportunity to move and settle where they had the need to. One of the most inhumane policies of the apartheid regime was the Pass Laws Act of 1952 (Beinart 1994, Thompson 1990) which made it compulsory for every non-white South African to carry a pass that would tell which race and homeland the person belonged to. If one was caught without the pass the person would go

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straight to prison, often for months (Telschow 2003). The pass laws became one of the most effective oppressive means for the apartheid regime, trying to control the increasing numbers of African migrant workers in the cities. In addition, social relations came under law where, for example, mixed marriages became illegal with the consequence that families had to split up. This the government referred to as “the separate development” (Africana, online, Thompson 2001).

As an effect of the segregation policy the regime established ten territories for the African population. The idea was that the “homelands” was to be defined as African “nations”, where the African people had access to the rights they otherwise were denied in the rest of the country, as well as the opportunity to “develop along its own lines” (Thompson 2001: 191). But, most of the homelands lacked both natural and financial resources and the political authority in order to establish a well-functioning society for its inhabitants. Thus, the human conditions became extremely poor and continued to deteriorate<sup>5</sup>. The severe situation in the homelands gave few options for the African but to seek waged labor in the industry complexes in Cape Town, Port Elisabeth or Durban.

The South African economy depended on the use of cheap labor and the idea was that men should leave their homelands and go to the cities to work in, for example, the mining industry. In the cities the workers were assigned to restricted and controlled areas where only those with legal papers were allowed access. Wives and children that visited their husbands and eventually moved into the towns, together with illegal workers (those that did not have a work permit) had to find accommodation and work on their own. They had to build their own houses of any useful material causing severe and poor standard without access to clean water or renovation facilities (Telschow 2003). These informal settlements became overcrowded because of the continuing migration from the rural areas with the consequence that unemployment and social problems in the form of alcohol and drug abuse, crime and violence caused an insecure environment. Eventually, the government lost control over the migration, to the point that in Cape Town in 1982 approximately 42% of the African population was living there without a permit (Telschow 2003).

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<sup>5</sup> As an illustration of the grave situation for people who lived in the homeland was the infant mortality rate on approximately 30% compared to 4% in the urban areas. For the white people infant mortality rate was below 1% (Boddy-Evans 2010).

The township of Crossroads, where this fieldwork was conducted, was established in 1975 as a direct consequence of the regimes segregation policy (Holmarsdottir 2005). Africans that lived in mixed townships (Africans and Colored) were forced to move to Crossroads and by this creating a township only for Africans. Today Crossroads still is a homogenous African township where most of the residents belongs to the Xhosa culture and originally come from the homelands of Ciskei and Transkei in Eastern Cape (Boddy-Evans 2010).

## 2.2 Education in South Africa

In 1994, with the abolishment of apartheid, South Africa started on a political transformation from an oppressive and racist regime towards a modern and democratic political system (DoE 2007). This process, that seemed unthinkable just few years back, became now reality, and as a result of a cooperation between the old regime and the ANC created one of the most comprehensive and inclusive constitutions in the world (Bauer and Taylor 2005).

The educational sector became in particular an important area to change since the education system during the apartheid era was used as a mean to keep the white population superior to the other population groups, and in particular the African population. *Bantu Education*, a term that came into use in the 1950`s, has been associated with the education system for the African children during apartheid (Holmarsdottir 2005). Through education the regime separated the population by race, geography and ideology (DoE 2007) and by this the education system prepared the children in different ways and determined their destinies, according to their expected positions in social, economic and political life during apartheid. This school system was based on the overall aim of keeping control of the population and not in providing development or improvements for the Africans.

Immediately after the election in 1994 the process began to restructure the education system and lay the foundation of a single national core syllabus (DoE 2007). In 1997 the new curriculum was introduced, Curriculum 2005, where one of the main manifests were set against the former political and ideological ideas of the apartheid state (Bredlid 2003). The curriculum was restructured to reflect a modern and democratic society and borrowed

pedagogical systems<sup>6</sup> and ideals from the educational system of Australia and New Zealand in particular (Breidlid 2003). Today the Constitution of South Africa guarantees every child a basic education and schooling is now compulsory for the first nine years.

The national curriculum is loaded with valued concepts related to a vision of a new South Africa. These values are strongly present not only in the core syllabus, but also in other educational policy documents as well<sup>7</sup>. Critical views have been stated against the South African curriculum, questioning its ability to actually be a curriculum for all South Africans or maybe it favours those who “fit” its epistemological orientation linked to “Western” notions of what may be regarded as valuable knowledge (Breidlid 2003, 2002a, Christie 2004). Thus, an important question asked in this literature is: To what extent are the values of education transferred into real knowledge and skills which can enable people to become active agents in the developing of a “new” South Africa?

### **2.2.1 Approaching gender in education**

Gender equality in education is part of the larger vision of a just, democratic and truly united country (National Gender Policy Framework, n.d.). Looking back, massive efforts were made on building a policy for gender equality in South African education after 1994. The establishment of the Gender Equity Task Team (GETT) in 1996 was a comprehensive investment in targeting gender in education. GETT provided a range of recommendations for the Department of Education on how gender issues should be addressed and assessed within the education system in addition to concrete recommendations on pedagogical and structural means in order to achieve gender equality in schools (Chisholm 2003). GETT also underlines the responsibility of government in taking legal measures to prevent gendered violence in schools and to raise consciousness on gender issues among students. Consistent with the development of a new democracy, there was a strong belief that ideals such as gender equity would be ensured by the new governmental structures. Since then the educational system with its pedagogical methods and resources, its focus on human rights and democratic

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<sup>6</sup>One of the borrowed pedagogical methods is outcomes-based pedagogy which was introduced in South Africa in 1997. Outcomes-based education considers the process of learning as important as the content. It is a student centred approach with high focus on student participation and activity-based teaching (DoE 2007).

<sup>7</sup>This will be further described in chapter six.

values, the organizing of students and classes, the subject content and structure has gone through major changes when it comes to inclusiveness and equality, thus adapting to a modern educational discourse (Breidlid 2003, Chisholm 2003, Chisholm and September 2005).

The statistics on access and matriculation outcome shows that South Africa is doing reasonably well regarding the MDG targets (GEEP 2008, Walker 2007). Regarding gender parity it is close to 50/50 and in line with the EFA goals of achieving equal access for boys and girls in schools (UNDP 2010, Walker 2007). So if statistics should be the main evaluator of gender equality in education it would be difficult to spot any severe gender inequality in South Africa (Unterhalter 2005). However, the statistical information here does not tell us about the factors of class, race or gender in the students achievements, nor about the experiences of girls and boys when it comes to academic learning or practices in the school or their experiences with the school-home relation. According to Pandor (2005) we have to look for the hidden face of gender inequality in order to truly address this issue. Thus, there is a need to go “behind the numbers game” (GEEP 2008). South Africa faces large challenges related to gender equality: established gender insensitive practices both in public and private life, repressive customs and traditions and unjust redistribution of material and financial resources. Women also constitute the poorest group in South Africa and are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed. And most severe, violence against women remains a serious problem in the South African society with an excessive rate of rape with the consequences of unwanted pregnancies, STI's and increased HIV/AIDS prevalence (National Gender Policy Framework, n.d.).

These examples describe a situation where the position of women in South Africa in relation to men parallels that of women in other parts of the world when it comes to being subjugated by patriarchal structures and discriminating traditional practices (GEEP 2008).

## 2.3 Summary

In this chapter I have given a brief presentation of the general context where this research has been conducted. I have chosen to draw out some specific aspects of South Africa which I believe is important background knowledge, some general facts about the country and its



population, some socio-economic characteristics and a brief presentation of the apartheid regime. In addition, I have presented some aspects of education and gender in South Africa today which I find relevant for this study.

The following chapter will provide a description of the methodology used for this research.

### **3. Methodology**

Entering the field of doing research in a new and unknown setting may seem like a high mountain to climb the first time. Bringing along a set of research questions and a clear purpose for the study in order to have a certain structure for your work, you still have to find your way through a vast amount of information and impressions that the people you meet and the surroundings you are located in will give you.

The methodological theory for doing research is meant to help you find the most appropriate tools in order to make sense of the new data as well as being able to handle this data with professional care. I find it therefore helpful to lean on what Patton (1990) calls the key assumptions which are underlying this kind of basic research that includes the fact that there are some patterns in the social world which create a framework for people lives, choices, perceptions and behaviour. These patterns can be discovered and explained. Within these patterns you may look for elements such as defined roles, intertwined expectations and power relations that work together in a complex social system. Taking on such a task to illuminate these patterns and the individual experiences of them, require thoughtful decisions about what kind of entry to the research and methods of data gathering I, as a researcher, should choose.

This chapter will present the methodological considerations that are underlying the choices of various methods used in this study of education and gender in a South African context. In addition I will here present the participants in my study, the research methods, the quality criteria of trustworthiness and ethical considerations. I will start with accounting for the choice of utilizing a qualitative research approach.

#### **3.1 Qualitative research**

The choice of a qualitative research approach is related to this study's aim of thoroughly describing and getting insight into the various participants' experiences, opinions and perceptions related to the research issues. A qualitative research approach is providing a set of tools that allows a researcher to go deeper into and reveal different aspects of the complex

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reality people live in. Denzin and Lincoln (2003 in Holmarsdottir 2005: 157) describe qualitative research as:

... a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative researchers study things (and people) in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

This quote suggests that the researcher receives information through various channels which provide a broad picture of what is being studied, tied to the natural environment of the phenomenon to be studied. This view relates to what Patton (1990) describes as four strategic ideals in qualitative inquiry which set the conditions for how to conduct this type of research. These ideals would be for instance real-world observations through naturalistic inquiry, openness towards what the findings tell you through inductive analysis, sensitivity towards how context affects the research issues, a holistic perspective of what is to be studied as well as a stance of empathic neutrality that refers to the need for being empathic towards the people you meet and also stay neutral to the findings (Patton 1990).

I entered the field with an ambition of using these ideals as a framework for investigating my research questions, but became aware that there are some limitations and challenges you meet as a researcher to reach these ideals. In particular the role of the researcher is important to illuminate because it somehow affects the research situation and thereby might disturb the context you are in fact studying. Both Kvale (1997) and Bryman (2008) emphasize the personal qualifications in doing research, the ability to empathize with the people you meet as well as being sensitive towards the complex reality the participants are facing.

Interpretivism is one of the main features of qualitative research which describes an epistemological view based on the idea that investigation of the social world needs to respect the differences between people by aiming to grasp people's subjective meaning of social action (Bryman 2008). This is not exclusively for the analysing part, but is an ongoing activity that the researcher has to perform throughout the process of research. As a consequence, you have to balance this personal engagement with a "neutral and non-judgemental stance" (Patton 1990: 41) in order to conduct a valid and reliable research.

Thus, empathic neutrality includes the concept of *verstehen*, which in qualitative inquiry means:

“... understanding, and refers to the unique human capacity to make sense of the world. (...) *Verstehen* is an attempt to “crack the code” of the culture, that is, detect the categories into which a culture codes actions and thoughts...” (Patton 1990: 56).

Being able to understand people’s realities and their social world requires other means than in physics or natural sciences because human beings behave and relate to each other in a much more complex way than flowers or microscopes in natural sciences does (Patton 1990). But even though the social and natural sciences differ in their epistemological approach, the distinction is not always as clear, as it might seem in theory. It is more a matter of emphasis according to Stake (1995) where elements of both qualitative and quantitative approach may occur. For instance, the use of quantitative methods such as questionnaires might be used in qualitative research to reveal more general patterns of the case. On the other hand, the role of the researcher as an interpreter, which is emphasised in qualitative research, will also be found in the process of quantitative analyses of data (Stake 1995).

During my fieldwork I did reflect upon whether I should include quantitative methods for gathering data, in order to ensure a thorough and broad data collection. I realized that the purpose of this study and the research questions that I was to answer required methods that would go deeper into the respondents mind sets and chose to concentrate on using in-depth interviews with different groups of respondents, combined with other methods of data gathering such as observation and diaries. Thus, I would be able to ensure that my study would obtain the amount of information needed in order to increase the trustworthiness of this research.

The qualitative approach is about trying to understand the complex interrelation between causes and consequences of human behaviour (Holmarsdottir 2005). Socio-economic and cultural factors are interrelated and create a certain context people have to relate to and that will influence their mind set, their actions and their perceptions of the social world. According to Denzin (1989 in Patton 1990: 438) the description of context links the individual concerns and troubles with the public issues and concerns. I found this evident in the setting I was conducting my fieldwork in. The way the respondents explained their feelings and perceptions of their lives and social relations would have been very difficult to

grasp without knowledge about their cultural and socio-economic background. In particular, how gender roles are understood and practiced among the respondents was closely related to their traditional background and urban living. Therefore, I was searching for “thick” descriptions of their family and community life in order to understand how gender relations are practiced and understood.

The importance of having a holistic view of the phenomenon to be studied is based on the belief that “understanding is better served by concentrating on the entity rather than on its constituent parts” (Stake 1995: 171). Thus, in order to understand a specific phenomenon or case, you need to look at a wide range of different factors that affects the phenomenon to be studied, such as the historical and political situation of the nation, the socio-economic conditions in the community and the cultural influences in people’s lives. I believe this study attempts to provide a broad picture of the students various perceptions and experiences on gender, both in a home and a school context.

### 3.2 The role of the researcher

The role of the researcher is in qualitative research a subjective and interpretive one; opposed to the objective stance a researcher within quantitative approach would take. Qualitative research is critiqued for being too subjective and unable to provide a neutral distance to its cases, which is an important aspect of positivistic research.

The issues of subjectivity and objectivity in research are about what kind of role, or how does the researcher itself influence the phenomenon that is to be investigated. Is it possible to step out of your own cultural background, go culturally neutral so to speak, in order to experience other people’s lives without any biases or preconceptions? I tend to agree with Patti Lather when she claims that “ways of knowing are inherently culture-bound and perspectival” (1991: 2). Thus, the researcher’s mindset are profoundly established in his or her cultural background and will therefore have an influence on how the researcher apprehends and interprets the people that she meets, the surroundings she is located in and the findings from the research. Is this a drawback with qualitative research? According to Kvale (1997) it is important to differ between a biased subjectivity where the researcher does not critically view and interpret the findings and interpretations of the research, and a

subjectivity which involves critical analyses of a phenomenon from different angles and perspectives. The plurality of perspectives and interpretations are in fact the strength of qualitative research (Kvale 1997), thus, the various cultural and social backgrounds of researchers can contribute to other and meaningful interpretations of the research data.

Being part in the GEEP project gave me an opportunity to present my findings and interpretations for the South African researchers in the project and thereby view this study from both an outsider and insider perspective. Their personal and professional knowledge to the topic and context of this study contributed to my understanding of the research issue with critical views and illuminating discussions.

In qualitative research there is a belief that knowledge is “constructed rather than discovered” (Stake 1995: 99), and that this construction of knowledge is a result of peoples intervention with each other. This belief differs from the traditional positivist stand where knowledge is viewed as an objective reality. In other words, how to understand knowledge in quantitative and qualitative research; differ between a focus on the observation *of* something, to conversation and interaction *with* social reality (Kvale 1997). The interaction that goes on between the researcher and the respondent during the interview dialogue is to a certain degree moulding people’s perceptions and knowledge, not by changing them, but by making them more visible and clear. I found this an interesting experience of qualitative research, where the respondents expressed that their knowledge and perceptions about the issues we discussed became more real for them through the interview process, than what they might think of them before the interviews.

The acknowledgement of the researcher as a participator in the construction of knowledge that occurs during social research creates a special responsibility in order to know how and to what extent the researcher affects the results of the research. Reflexivity has to do with the role of the researcher in the process of investigating the social world and the construction of knowledge of people’s lives. In other words, social science cannot be isolated from the researchers own background and therefore researchers have to be “reflective about the implications of their methods, values, biases and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they generate” (Bryman 2008: 682).

My position, being a Norwegian woman growing up in an affluent social democracy, was in sharp contrast to the situation that my respondents are experiencing of racial- and gender discrimination in a marginalized community.

This contrast might have had an impact on the answers given to me, that they would answer what was “expected” of them rather than to show their sincere opinions. Especially when we discussed issues of modern and traditional gender roles, I sometimes got the impression that their utterances were coloured by assumptions of what is “politically correct” by a strong public discourse that regards modern gender roles to be the most valuable.

I am aware that my background might have coloured the perspectives of this study and also how I value and emphasise certain elements that would “fit” my conclusions, my worldview and sense of moral thinking. I have, however, as being a part in the GEEP project, been presenting my findings (on three occasions) and thus been subjugated to confirmation by the other researchers, which I believe has increased the trustworthiness of this study. This participation has helped me being critical towards my potential influence and I have tried my very best to grasp the genuine descriptions and perceptions of my respondents in order to become a channel for their voices, and not my own.

### 3.3 Sample

Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on selectively small samples (...) *selected purposefully* (Patton 1991: 169)<sup>8</sup>.

The sampling approach in social research is recognized by its focus on people and also usually by a relatively small sample, which is selected purposefully, and by this be able to go deeper within the research issues (Bryman 2008). This is in contrast to quantitative sampling that uses a larger sample that is also selected randomly. The choice of sampling approach is closely connected to the purpose of the study. This study has as its purpose to collect data, and draw some conclusions out from a specific target population, namely young South-Africans living in a township environment. I chose a smaller sample of people for this

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<sup>8</sup> Emphasis in original

research due to go deeper into the research issues, and to understand their lives and situations. This study also aims to use this sample as an example of how young people experience living in a marginalized community, how they relate to gender issues and their perceptions of education. With this in mind I selected groups of participants I believed would give me different perspectives to this study. Thus, purposeful sampling was used for my research.

Purposeful sampling is an overall sampling approach with then several ways to sample within (Patton 1991). One of this ways is snowball sampling which means that the researcher gets in contact either formally or informally, with people that can contribute to the study (Bryman 2008). I experienced this as part of my purposeful sampling, that some of the respondents were not intentionally chosen in the first place, but were suggested by other participants. I experienced that these meetings gave me valuable information often connected to certain parts of my study. In particular, I had company with one of the male teachers who were driving with me to and from the school almost every day. We had long, informal talks that either confirmed or tested my new-won knowledge and impressions about the research topics, and he kindly shared with me his own experiences and opinions while we cautiously followed the morning- and afternoon traffic in Cape Town.

One critical question on sampling that needs to be asked is whether the sample was large enough in order to give this study convincing conclusions? According to Patton (1990):

Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources (Patton 1990: 184).

The purpose of this study, being a qualitative research the purpose is to conduct an exemplifying case and not to generalize. Thus, I believe that the amount of respondents ensured me with enough in-depth data in order to describe the context where I conducted my fieldwork, to reveal some of the patterns of the social world that in particular was related to gender, as well as the role of education. I had to decide for an amount of respondents that would be possible to work with within the timeframe I had and at the same time ensure that my sample was big enough to answer the research questions at hand. This I believe I achieved successfully. In the next two sections I will present the school and respondents more detailed.



### **3.3.1 The school**

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the school where I conducted my fieldwork was “given” to me from the network project, GEEP (Gender Equality, Equity and Poverty) where my study as part of my master degree is included. The school was established in 1993, on an initiative from a group of parents that saw the urgent need for a new school in the area. An old haywire building was the only option and for ten years the school had very few resources at their disposal, unacceptable physical conditions as well as the social challenges in the community that both students and teachers were facing on a daily basis. In 2003 a new school building was finished, and many of the teaching obstacles were solved with new and clean classrooms and teaching facilities. In 2005, the school was engaged in a friendship relation with an Irish school and through donations they gave the school an opportunity to prioritise and build up a well-functioning computer lab. This makes the school one of the most well equipped schools in the area which affects the academic level of the students, as well as the social environment in the school.

Eventhough the school itself has a much better standard than other schools in the area, the students are sharing the same community background as students in the more marginalized schools. They would refer to the same cultural and social background, and experience the same grave challenges of their community. Their perceptions of the school and its role for their future, I believe, was coloured by the fact that this school could provide them with good facilities and an inclusive and safe social environment. My experience would probably have been different if I had been located in another school in Crossroads, however, regarding that this thesis has an emphasis on gender perceptions in particular, I believe that my respondents were indeed experiencing the complexity of traditional and modern values, the gap between the school and the home, in a more profound way than their co-students in one of the other schools.

### **3.3.2 The respondents**

When selecting respondents for this research I decided to focus on people that had a direct reference to my research questions, thus using a purposive sample (Bryman 2008). This meant that I was deciding for some criteria for which to interview so that I would ensure access to the information I needed.

In total, I conducted qualitative interviews with 13 students from grade 9, five female and four male students. The reason for selecting students from grade 9 was based on my assumption that the oldest students would be more experienced and motivated to discuss issues related to gender as well as have a more critical view on their surroundings and life situation, than younger students. Another reason was my wish for conducting these interviews in English and thereby has a direct communication with my respondents. I was aware that conducting interviews in a second language, for both myself and the students, could limit the conversation, but I experienced that we were fully able to reflect upon the research issues.

Seven teachers volunteered to participate in my study, four female teachers and three male teachers. They represented different levels in the system, teachers and deputies, they were teaching in classes from grade 1 to 9 and together they had experiences of teaching most of the subjects in the school. This gave me access to a broad experience when it comes to view the student's situations and how the school addresses gender issues on different levels.

I conducted interviews with three parents/guardians of those students who participated in my study. They volunteered to participate after receiving a letter where I explained the purpose of my fieldwork and gave them the opportunity to choose time and place for the interview. They were also given the choice of using either Xhosa or English as language of communication for these interviews. Two of them were comfortable with speaking English, while I used an interpreter for the third parent who did not speak English.

Finally, the principal became a valuable source of information for my study. Through several formal and informal conversations she shared her experiences and reflections around education and schooling, gender issues, tradition and modernity, the social challenges the school faces on a daily basis and how it affect the schools opportunity for being an agent of change.

### 3.4 Research methods

Acknowledging that human behaviour is a result of its complex surroundings and social relations means that the methods used for gathering data have to be chosen wisely and sensitively dealt with. My choice of research methods was based on what kind of information

I needed for my study in order to get as close as I could to understand how people live and how they relate to the issues I have chosen to focus on.

The use of a variety of methods gave me the opportunity to compare the different sources of data, identify where more information would be needed, and thereby triangulate my data as thoroughly as possible. Thus, each and one of these methods gave me specific information and perspectives on my study. For instance, public documents would describe for me the policy background the school is building its practices on, the observations would give me visual experiences with the social context and the interviews gave me more in-depth explanations of people's experiences.

In the following sections I will present the various data gathering methods utilized in this study, and I start with the choice of qualitative interviews.

### **3.4.1 Qualitative interviews**

“The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind” (Patton 1990: 278). We conduct interviews in research because of the fact that everything cannot be observed; there is a limit of how much we can actually understand of a phenomenon just by observing it. The reasons behind people's actions, the experiences they live with, their behaviour in the past or their expectations for the future are more easily explained by words. Therefore, qualitative interviews became the main method of generating data during my fieldwork because this method has an advantage in social research by giving the researcher specific access to the respondents world and thereby an opportunity to understand the basis for the choices and behaviour of people (Kvale 1997). I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews, which allows the researcher to be more flexible in the search for information. The focus lies on the respondent's points of view and to get rich and detailed answers from them on the relevant issues, opposed to interviews in quantitative research where deciding what kind of information that is relevant is a concern of the researcher (Bryman 2008).

Regarding the respondents as the main source of knowledge for my study I found that this form of interview allowed them to focus and dwell on various aspects that they found interesting and important to talk about. By this I believe that I was able to get closer to their

experiences and also by using this type of interview approach, it allowed me to obtain information I would not have considered relevant beforehand.

For this purpose I used what Patton (1990) describes as a general interview guide approach. This involves outlining a set of issues that are to be discussed during the interview, but not necessarily with any particular order or wording of the questions (Patton 1990). The interview guide serves as a checklist during the interview so that all topics are ensured covered. Also knowing that there is a limited timeframe for the interviews, I saw the need for some structure of these conversations.

The interview guide used with the student and teachers was divided into three main sections<sup>9</sup>. The first focused on the description of the context, facts about home conditions, their experiences of living in Crossroads and perceptions of their community and culture. The next section focused on their experiences and perceptions of gender roles, and more concrete about the difference between gender roles and practices in home and school. The final section related to their experiences and perceptions of education, what kind of role education has for individuals and the community and how the school relates to the social and cultural challenges found in Crossroads. With each section I had prepared some concrete questions in case the respondents needed some help to understand the issue or “get into” the topic.

I decided to conduct two interviews in particular for two reasons. First, I wanted to make sure that the respondents were given enough time to elaborate on the issues we discussed. The first round of interviews lasted between 50 and 60 minutes, and was often closed at this time because we needed a break, or because the students had to attend lessons. The students showed great interest in these interviews, and offering them a second conversation would give us a chance of getting deeper into the issues we discussed. Also, conducting one more interview with the students gave me the opportunity to confirm statements and utterances that was given during the first interview, which was valuable due to the aim of validation in research. The teachers and parents I conducted formal interviews with only once. This, partly because of the time limit of my fieldwork, but mainly because I experienced that I could be

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<sup>9</sup> See appendix A

more straight to the point on the research topics and not in the same degree elaborate on the individual life stories as I did with the students.

All of the formal interviews were tape-recorded. This allowed me to focus in particular on the respondents, on what was said and on how things were expressed. I realized that interviewing required much concentration and reflections during the process. If I had to take notes as well, it would have disturbed the conversation and made it less constructive. The intention of using tape-recorder was also related to the aim of ensuring accuracy in the work of analysing the data. All of the interviewees gave their written consent to being recorded.

The interviews took place in a small office, located in the middle of the school building with classrooms, the computer lab, the assembly hall and the outdoor area just outside. During the day I could witness the different activities around me: the line ups, the play, the prayers and gospels from the assembly hall, students practicing role-playing and presentations, sharing secrets and jokes, teachers hurrying to class while reprimanding students who were perhaps too late for class. When I was not conducting interviews or writing field notes in the office, I used the opportunity to stay outside and talk to the students, or just to observe their activities and behaviour. These observations gave me valuable impressions of the social and academic life of the students. In the next section I will further account for how observation was used in this study.

### **3.4.2 Observation**

The purpose of observation is to describe the particular setting of a study. It is to give detailed and descriptive information about the activities that took place, the people who participated and the meanings of these activities from the perspective of the participants (Patton 1990). Observations in qualitative research places the researcher in the midst of the natural context of what is investigated and give access to people's behaviour, relationships and actions (Holmarsdottir 2005). In my study observations were chosen as a way of getting information of how the school, classes and teaching were organised and of how the students were relating to each other and to their teachers, with a particular focus on gender roles.

The observations that I conducted took the form of what I will describe as both formal and informal observation. The observations that took place in the classroom were well prepared

for and I used an observation form<sup>10</sup> in order to keep myself focused on the specific issues of my study such as girls and boys academic participation, cooperation between boys and girls, teachers attention towards the students, general behaviour of the students and responses from the teacher. Notes were taken during the observations and I could compare after and find similarities or differences in practices and ways of organising lessons. On the other hand, the informal observations were the more general impressions I gathered by being present in this particular research setting during the breaks and assemblies and by walking and driving in the area around the school. I was less able to structure and compare these observations as I could with the class sessions, but I ensured that the data I found important and relevant from these observations was written down together with the other data. Thus, I believe that eye-witnessing the surroundings of these actions gives valuable and contemplating information to the other data collection methods.

According to Patton (1990) the observational data contributes to the understanding of the context, and thereby becomes essential in establishing a holistic perspective. This became clear to me in particular, when I was invited to visit the homes of three of the students, which was in walking distance from the school. Here, I could get an impression of their family situations, description of their living standards and the local surrounding of the places they live in. These observations were of major value for my attempt to understand the meanings that were expressed during the interviews as well as the more general context of this study.

### **3.4.3 Diaries**

Diaries have for a long time been considered by social researchers to be of major importance when life stories are to be investigated. It is used to collect detailed information about people's behaviour and events and other aspects of their daily lives (Corti 1993).

Bryman (2008) is referring to different types of diaries related to how they can be used differently in research. The diary may be an instrument for the researcher in the form of a log where the researcher can document the activities of research (like field notes), or it can be used by the participants to document specific activities that is to be investigated. This is a

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<sup>10</sup> See appendix C.

more structural form of diary, where the diarist is not supposed to write about other issues than what is decided by the researcher (Bryman 2008). With the third definition, which I chose to use here, the diary is a document written more or less spontaneously by the student participants in the study (Bryman 2008). This form of data collection was used in order to come closer to the participants own definitions of what is important information to share with me as a researcher, and where they also could dwell more on certain aspects in their lives.

One of the advantages that diaries have over other data collection methods is that they are a reliable alternative to interviews where sensitive issues or difficult life situations are discussed face to face, or are difficult to recall accurately (Corti 1993). This was mainly the reason why I chose to let only the students write diaries, as I believed that some of the issues we discussed, especially their family stories were both difficult and sensitive to talk about. Thus, the diaries were a channel of information where my role as a researcher, to a lesser extent would influence how they expressed themselves. In addition, the students were seen as the main group of respondents and I chose to have a main focus on the data gathering on them.

I gave few criteria for what they should write about, but said that they could have as a starting point what we had discussed in the interviews, such as their family background, their perceptions of gender and their future. The freedom to define for themselves what to fill the diaries with made the books very personal and also emotional. I found their willingness to share their thoughts and experiences through poems and drawings and stories to contribute strongly to this source of information, strengthening the knowledge and insight I was searching for in this study.

Because they showed so much effort and pride in writing the diary I decided to photocopy all the books so that they could continue with keeping the diary after I had left. The copies of the diaries are one part of the textual data I brought from Cape Town, together with the interview transcriptions, observation notes and policy documents.

#### **3.4.4 Document analyses**

I had few perceptions about what kind of documents that would be important for this study beforehand, except for the national curriculum and policy documents that the school itself would have developed in order to find out how the school relates to the issues in focus for my study. However, along the process of fieldwork, I saw the need to include other types of documents such as assessment and guideline documents, reports and strategy papers<sup>11</sup>. I was in particular concentrating on documents related to the Life Orientation subject for the secondary phase (grade 7-9) because it more specifically address issues related to social relations and individual development. Another source of information was the educational documents produced by the Western Cape Educational Department. These were in particular interesting as they presented the strategic ideals for education when it comes to the development of human capital and the role of education in society. These policy documents function as a framework for all the schools in the region and for how they are defining their practices.

In addition, I was actively using newspapers, their critical articles and letters from readers as a source of information with a particular focus on gender issues and socio-economic situation of people.

Analysing textual data requires a critical reading and an understanding of documents as social products that is not free of biases (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Public documents as well as personal documents are created within a context and should therefore be read according to this context. The documents chosen for this study were aimed to give an overview of how gender is approached in the educational policy. My analysis included both a quantitative search of the concept of gender and an interpretation of how gender issues are communicated. The policy documents are thereafter compared to the research schools practices and perceptions of gender equality.

I will now move on to the trustworthiness in research in order to describe how I ensured validity and reliability for this study.

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<sup>11</sup> See appendix E for a list of the documents used in this study



### 3.5 Trustworthiness in research

Reliability and validity are common criteria for assessing and establishing quality in social research (Bryman 2008). These criteria are used in both quantitative and qualitative research, but within qualitative research there is a need for adapting these criteria to the nature of a complex and unpredictable social world. The social reality is flexible, and thereby the quality criteria for social research should be flexible (Bryman 2008). In addition, qualitative research is highly dependent on the researcher, his or her credibility and competence (Patton 1990, Stake 1995). On these grounds, how can we ensure quality in qualitative research?

Lincoln and Guba (1985 and 1994, in Bryman 2008: 377) present trustworthiness and authenticity as two alternative criteria for qualitative inquiries. Trustworthiness is referring to the importance of acknowledging that there exist multiple accounts of social reality, and that it is not the researcher's task to reveal any absolute truths out from it, as is expected in quantitative research (Bryman 2008). At the same time, qualitative research has to ensure that the measures have been accurate and the interpretations logical to accomplish professional quality in research (Stake 1995). Trustworthiness consists of four aspects namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability that correspond to the criteria of validity and reliability in quantitative research (Bryman 2008).

Whether the findings ensure credibility is related to two practices. First, by using multiple methods of data gathering, also called triangulation (Patton 1990, Bryman 2008) which means that several sources of data are used in the same study in order to cross-check information. In my research on context, gender and education in South Africa I was gathering information from policy documents, interviews with different stakeholders, observations and diaries in an attempt to reveal consistent explanations and descriptions as well as a more general pattern of how these issues are interrelated. Second, by conducting two interviews with the students I could check my interpretation of their statements from the first interview. Thus, those who participated in this study were given an opportunity to confirm the findings and thereby ensure respondent validation (Bryman 2008).

Moreover, during the process of writing this thesis I have participated in seminars and student groups, where both my peers and supervisors have commented and critiqued in all the phases of this study. In addition, and as noted earlier, as this study is part of an ongoing

research project, I got the opportunity to present my findings on occasions to an expert panel of professors from the GEEP project. In particular the South African professors were familiar with the setting I conducted my fieldwork as well as the issues I was investigating, and gave me valuable and critical feedback, as well as confirming the main findings in this study.

Since qualitative research typically is a study of a smaller group of people, seeking more depth, than breadth in data (Bryman 2008), generalisation of the findings to a larger part of the population is difficult and not necessarily the aim in qualitative research. Instead, transferability is used in order to make findings from social research possible to transfer to other similar contexts. Transferability involves what is called “thick description”. A rich and detailed description of culture and socio-economic conditions give readers an opportunity to understand the basis for the interpretations and conclusions the researcher has produced and thereby can draw their own conclusions (Bryman 2008, Patton 1990). In the township of Crossroads I found a context that was very complex in many aspects. A class-divided society, the mix of traditional and modern culture, the grave social insecurity people experienced was just some contextual aspects that would influence how my respondents perceived gender and educational issues. I believe that through these descriptions, I can define some general patterns of causes and consequences related to gender issues in marginalized communities that see a transition from tradition to modernity, and that these patterns may also be transferred to other similar contexts.

One of the most common concerns about qualitative methods is the subjective role of the researcher (Patton 1990). Objectivity, also discussed in section 3.2, is traditionally viewed as an important and unfailing criterion of quality in research. Social research on the other hand requires an involved researcher that places herself within the context of the study, that face to face meets the people who participate in the study, which have firsthand knowledge about the issues to be studied. In such situations the researcher cannot stay objective, or distanced to a person that shares his or her story, but actually by all means, has to try to empathically understand this person’s life. It is the insight and knowledge that comes out from such meetings, in the real world, that lays the basis for a possible understanding of the social world.

Reflexivity and self-criticism in social research is highly important and means that the researcher becomes aware of their own role, biases and preconceptions of the context, people

and issues that are to be studied (Bryman 2008). According to Lather (1991) feminist research has a long tradition of developing critical skills towards patriarchal structures, but has an important task to do in order to also develop self-critical skills towards their own role as researchers and scholars.

Research, which encourages self and social understanding and change-enhancing action on the part of “developing progressive groups”, requires research designs that allow us as researchers to reflect on how our value commitments insert themselves into our empirical work. Our own framework of understanding needs to be critically examined as we look for the tensions and contradictions they might entail (Lather 1991: 80).

I am aware that my background (coming from Norway) and life values (being a woman, mother and a teacher) most likely had an impact on the process of gathering and analysing data. The questions I asked, the choice of participants, the interpretation of statements has not been conducted without a connection to my own perceptions and knowledge on the topic. This recognition of my subjectivity has however made me attentive to use techniques that nevertheless should ensure a reflexive praxis. I have strived to meet Kvaales (1995) advices for reaching internal validity in social research, by asking clarifying questions when needed, a critical use of leading questions when I had to confirm utterances and statements, and also by constantly interpreting the data along the process. As mentioned above, I conducted two interviews with the students in order to ensure that my interpretations of the information they gave me would be correct, and, as mentioned earlier, I have on several occasions tested my findings and research process to both student colleagues and professors.

I will now move on to another important aspect of doing social research, the responsibility and sensitivity that the researcher has to ensure the participants, the ethical considerations.

### 3.6 Ethics

Interviews are interventions. They affect people. A good interview lays open thoughts, feelings, knowledge, and experience not only to the interviewer but also to the interviewee. The process of being taken through a directed, reflective process affects the persons being interviewed and leaves them knowing things about themselves that they didn't know - or least were not aware of - before the interview (Patton 1990: 354).

My experience from conducting interviews with students, teachers and parents about values and practices related to gender also brought emotional and difficult memories of broken families, grief of lost parents, anger and loneliness about their situation to the interviews. I was not only to collect data, but also handle with care these reactions, and ensure that what they told me I would not reveal to other people.

The ethical dimensions in research is emphasising the responsibility and decency you as a researcher have to expel towards the context and the persons participating in the study (Patton 1990). According to Kvale (1997) ethical considerations have to be included throughout the research process, from the planning of the study, the gathering of data, the analysing process and the writing of the report. In particular three ethical rules should be emphasised in social research: informed consent, confidentiality and consequences for the participants (Kvale 1997).

Informed consent means that the participants in the study are informed about the purpose of the research, how the interviews will take form and what we will talk about, and thereby give the respondents the opportunity to at any time withdraw from the project if they don't feel comfortable about participating in the study (Kvale 1997, Bryman 2008). I spent some time in the beginning of every interview to explain why I was doing this research and why I wanted to conduct interviews with these particular respondents. Usually, they had several questions about it as well and I experienced that I had to explain quite thoroughly my intentions for this study.

Confidentiality is about ensuring the participants anonymity and thereby respectfully treats the information solely in regard to the research itself and prevents this information from being misused in other connections (Bryman 2008). Thus, responses would be held in strictest confidence and that no names or other individual identifiers will be attached to any direct quotations that are reproduced in written or oral reports. I chose to use a written consent form<sup>12</sup> that emphasised both the main purpose of this study and that the anonymity of the respondents would be respected. This form also asked for their consent for using a tape recorder during the interviews for the sole purpose of being accurate during analyses of data.

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<sup>12</sup> See appendix D

Eventhough you as a researcher try to protect the respondents from any burdens they might experience through participating in the interviews, it is impossible to foresee all potential negative outcomes (Kvale 1997). I was aware of that parts of the interview, as mentioned above, might bring forward complex and painful emotions. I was therefore ensuring the participants that they at any time, both in the interviews and diaries, could decide what we could talk about and how detailed they would discuss personal issues. However, on the basis of the responses I got from the participants, I believe that I managed to give room for their genuine thoughts and emotions and at the same time respect their limits for what kind of information they would share.

### 3.7 Summary

In this chapter I have described systematically the various research methods chosen for this study as well as the underlying philosophical assumptions and considerations for doing qualitative research. In the next chapter I will present the theoretical framework for this study.

## **4. Theoretical framework**

The aim of this thesis is to examine how a group of students, teachers and parents in a South African township perceive the concepts of gender equality and equity and what role education may have as a changer of social norms. The social and cultural environment of the township of Crossroads entails for its inhabitants a complex combination of modern and traditional expectations and practices, and it is within this complexity South African education finds its challenges in attempting to reform gender perceptions. The research questions used in this study, as well as the process of fieldwork, has led me to the choice of certain theoretical ideas and concepts in order to analyse and understand the findings in this study.

Two theoretical frameworks are chosen for this thesis, the social construction theory and the capability theory. There are different reasons for choosing these related to the different categories of findings. In the process of understanding gendered relations and practices in the participants home and community context, I realized that the social construction theory offered a theoretical structure for which I could relate my findings to. This theory is regarded in this thesis as an important tool in order to understand a complex and, for me, new context. The capability approach is a normative framework which offers a set of concepts that are valuable for development thinking. This approach is therefore used in this thesis as a tool for both evaluating and discussing the role of education, in particular the role as a promoter of gender equality and equity. Due to space limitations for this thesis, I am unable to include every aspect of the two theories, as both of them are major theoretical works within social science. I have therefore chosen some concepts and ideas from each of them, which I argue are relevant and useful for this study. First I will present the concept of gender and briefly explain how it is developed and defined in research.

### **4.1 Conceptualising gender**

In the process of constructing the research questions that frame this study, a focus was established on the concept of gender and how the participants perceived this concept in relation to their experiences and knowledge. While some of the respondents described gender

as solely a physical difference between men and women, others would relate the concept to notions of power, family relations and the different roles men and women hold in society. Because gender is a concept of such different meanings and perceptions a certain definition of the term was needed so that the process of conducting the interviews became as meaningful and constructive as possible. Therefore, as a starting point for this study and throughout the collection and analyses of data, gender is defined as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon that describes the roles and expectations of men and women in society. In this section I will elaborate on some of the aspects of gender that I find relevant for my study but firstly I will go back in time and briefly present the history of gender as an academic and political term.

#### **4.1.1 Approaches to gender**

The academic concept of gender has gone through various stages with regard to definitions and uses. Its starting point is with Ann Oakley's essay from 1972, "Sex, Gender and Society" (Dillabough 2006, Stromquist and Fischman 2009). Oakley's key argument was that in the study of inequality, gender differences had to be understood as being socially constructed "rather than a fixed biological entity" (Dillabough 2006: 17). Feminist studies during the 70's and 80's kept with this shift and established the concept of gender as a term that first and foremost promoted women's rights and their struggle against oppression and discrimination.

For 40 years the notion of gender has been linked to two waves of feminist thinking which have influenced the national and international agendas. The first, Woman in Development (WID) had a focus on the political and economic conditions of women and their needs due to access to land, education, credit and employment. This approach had a focus on recording and describing women's situation and thereby opened up for an attention to "women's viewpoints" which was in contrast to earlier development perspectives that had ignored women as an important part of development building (Bailey 2005, Stromquist and Fischman 2009). During the 1980's, with the rise of the feminist movement, a new perspective, Gender and Development (GAD) was developed with a larger focus on exposing the oppression and discrimination of women. It offered a new understanding on gender differences where power relations in the society were recognized as playing a key role in the formation of gender (Bailey 2005, Fennel and Arnot 2008). The inequalities of power

between men and women, which are formed by ideological, religious, ethnic, cultural and economic determinants, were now interpreted as being central forces to gender differences. Thus, through this approach a broader understanding to the concept of gender inequalities was established.

Both of these gender perspectives were products of western academia and feminist thinking, and thus were challenged from African, South American and Asian feminists emphasising that different countries have different historical and cultural contexts that create distinctive understandings of gender and gender relations (Morrell 2005). Terms like “gender”, “manhood”, “womanhood” will differ from, for example, a stable affluent society to a marginalized traditional society. The divide between modern and traditional conceptualisations of gender and the different epistemologies they hold is an important focus in this study as some of the main findings describe a gap between how the school as a modern institution and the home with its traditional practices perform gender socialisation.

New conceptual thinking is in fact an important step in the process of developing strategies that can meet the challenges of gender inequality (Stromquist and Fischman 2009). Gender has traditionally been debated among feminists and to a lesser extent among critical scholars, which has indicated that gender is a specific concern for women. The concept has also had a focus on the dichotomy of feminism and masculinity, where the description of an oppressive relationship in favour of the masculine role is often used. Both of these established perceptions of gender gives a simplistic and limited understanding of how the concept should be used and recognised (Stromquist and Fischman 2009). The established gender concept is critiqued because it gives an impression that gender is mainly a women’s issue leaving out the considerations for *how* and *why* they find themselves in disadvantaged situations (Fennel and Arnot 2008, Stromquist and Fischman 2009, Holmarsdottir, forthcoming). There is now a call for going deeper and looking into the impact gender issues may have for opportunities and constraints for both women and men and actively search for solutions on gender inequalities.

It has become imperative that we move into a proactive mode that shifts from the identification of conditions and problems to sustained attempts to push forward improvements and find solutions (Stromquist and Fishman 2009: 464).



The alternative approach then is to describe and explore the “particular, specific contextual conditions in which gender dynamics and patterns work within the society” (Fennel and Arnot 2008: 6). In other words, by identifying the mechanisms that in fact reproduce gender inequalities in communities it may be possible to find solutions to break those chains of production/re-production, also referred to as “undoing gender” in the literature (Lorber 2000, Bajaj 2009, Murphy-Graham 2009, Stromquist and Fischman 2009). In order to do so we have to include the multiple gendered realities that face both men and women in the community and try to understand how individuals are moulded into gendered individuals. In the next section I will elaborate briefly on how gender and social processes may be connected as well as look into the issue of masculinity.

#### **4.1.2 Gender as social construction**

From a social constructionist structural gender perspective, it is the ubiquitous division of people into two unequally valued categories that undergirds the continually reappearing instances of gender inequality (Lorber 2000: 79).

This quote suggests that the division, the focus on the differences between men and women, are strengthening gender inequalities and that the social structures which gender division are part of keeps inequalities intact. Gender division is fundamentally ingrained in societies and is deeply rooted in every aspect of social life as well as professional life (Lorber 2000). Family life, leisure activities and work life is characterised by an informal gendered division where attitudes and activities are defined as suitable or proper regarding gendered expectations. All of these expectations are produced within specific cultural, religious, traditional and historical frameworks, which give the two gender roles different meanings and content with regard to which context or time they are produced in. Gendered relations seem therefore changeable when it comes to how they are organised and how strictly they are practiced. I believe it is possible to suggest that the gender division is understood as a socially constructed phenomenon, thus relating to the theory on social construction which will be presented in section 4.2.

The term *intersectionality* more specifically describes the interaction between gender, social practices, institutional arrangements and cultural ideologies and emphasises the complex

web of influential factors that contribute to the making of the different gender practices and discourses (Cole 2009, Stromquist and Fishman 2009).

The social order is an intersectional structure, with socially constructed individuals and groups ranged in a pyramidal hierarchy of power and powerlessness, privilege and disadvantage, normality and otherness. Because these social statuses and the rationales that legitimate their inequality are constructed in the interaction of everyday life and in cultural representations and solidified in institutional practices and laws, they can all be subverted by resistance, rebellion and concerted political action (Lorber 2000: 86).

This quote suggests that the social orders, whereby men and women are positioned in, are a strict hierarchy where power and advantages are distributed. The quote also suggests that everyday life may not only be that casually in its structure, but rather a stage where pre-determined roles and acts are performed. I believe that this description may be recognised also in the context in which this study is conducted, where traditional gender practices are performed within a hegemonic patriarchy. Lorber (2000) also suggests that such structures, and the legitimization of them, may be challenged and exposed to resistance. Recalling the post-apartheid constitution of South Africa and its emphasis on equality and rights for the individual, it may seem to inspire how people today view their gendered situations, becoming more conscious about the issue. Thus, with the import of modern gender perceptions in society, the traditional and established gender order, for example within the Xhosa populated township of Crossroad, has been challenged with new definitions and aspirations to the role of men and women (Arnot and Mac an Ghail 2006). On the one side, it seems to be a rise of female empowerment within South Africa, characterised by more women in education and employment. On the other side, the process of gender transformation seems to be very challenging, often with an escalation of violence and abuse as a consequence (UNFPA 2000, Arnot and Mac an Ghail 2006).

The conviction that gender is a social construction and not a biological natural order gives us an opportunity and an obligation to challenge the unjust and discriminating practices that control the lives of so many women around the world, as well as the consequence of hampered progress of family- and community situations. Therefore, in order to address and promote gender equality and equity, we need to look at the male role in social relations and try to understand how masculinity is produced and sustained within communities.

According to Stromquist and Fischman (2009) the common tendency to treat gender as synonymous with female issues is a shortcoming, and is therefore not taking into consideration the whole picture of gendered patterns that exist in society. In order to do so men's role and positions need to be included in gender studies and policies. This is not to undermine the importance and the obligation of having a focus on those women that find themselves in marginalized and disadvantaged situations, which I believe is evident in the struggle for gender equality and equity, but it is argued that the one-dimensional view (the female perspective) is "an insufficient theoretical and political strategy" due to finding constructive and sustainable solutions on unjust gender relations (Stromquist and Fischman 2009: 467). Defining gender inequality as a "women's problem" only can be interpreted that the solution to this "problem" should rest entirely with women, thereby making the important alliances and cooperation with men in order to solve gender issues much more difficult. How then can we approach men's world to include them in the achievement of gender equality?

The concept of masculinity describes the various sets of social practices which influences how it is to be a man as well as being a product of "cultural representations" where social expectations, stereotypes and role models contribute to the creation of what is recognised as manhood (Connell 2006, DAW 2008, Pilcher and Whelehan 2004). Such representations have to be understood from the various contexts in which they are produced, thus making the definition of masculinity and manhood culturally and socially dependent.

In a South African context, perceptions and practices on manhood and masculinities are related to various complex contextual causes. Today, the critical level of unemployment in the townships together with a high level of alcohol- and drug abuse is devastating for family relations and the attempt of creating safe communities for people (Morrell 2005). In addition, the practices of traditional definitions of manhood stand strong in particular within the male population, such as the boy's initiation ritual<sup>13</sup> and the position as head within families and communities. Thus, a combination of historical, social and cultural features influences the definition of manhood in South Africa.

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<sup>13</sup> See section 5.4.2 for further description of boys initiation ritual.

Social change that involves a change in gendered relation does not happen “naturally”, but through social modifications and by changing the collective consciousness of how people define man- and womanhood (Stromquist and Fischman 2009). I will in this thesis argue that an important part of this process, of changing unjust gender practices, requires that also men’s role, identities and interests must be included in the concept of gender equality and equity.

### **4.1.3 Gender equality – Gender equity**

In the study of gender, the terms equality and equity are often referred to but not always defined or explained properly. This has probably to do with the task of evaluation and measurement of these concepts. In education, gender equality has usually been defined within the range of equal access, equal opportunities, or equal skills gained through schooling (Vaughan 2007). All which are easily countable. The notion of gender equality as numerical equality has been dominant in both global and national gender policies (GEEP 2008, Fennel and Arnot 2008). However, eventhough gender equality often is used numerically it does not necessarily mean equal numbers but is also used in literature as a concept that recognizes that men and women should have equal opportunities to live fulfilling lives (Momsen 2004). Gender equality may be defined as:

Meeting women’s, men’s, girls and boys needs in order for them to compete in the formal and informal labour market, to participate fully in civil society and to fulfil their familial roles adequately without being discriminated against because of their gender (Wolpe, Quinlan and Martinez 1997 quoted in Chisholm and September 2005: 3).

Gender equity on the other hand, lacks a clearer definition much because it relates to issues that are more requiring when it comes to evaluation and measurement. It is not easily countable. Gender equity emphasises redistribution of resource between men and women such as advantage/disadvantage, personal well-being and needs and quality of schooling more than equal access (Sivasubramaniam 2008). There is a lack of good and effective methods for how to define different levels of emotional and personal expressions, which often then leave these aspects of human life with less attention within policy discourses. I believe that the capability approach with its emphasis on capabilities, agency and freedoms

manages to offer a normative framework where the concept of equity is included and concretised (this will be further elaborated on in section 4.3.).

However, there is a clear tendency arising within the global discourse on gender that equity is now recently taking over for the term equality which has traditionally dominated international organisations and reports (Holmarsdottir, forthcoming). To a large extent equity now involves definitions of both counting and understanding and that it now appears to be “a catch all term”, thus it seems that how concepts are understood and utilised are changing over time.

In this thesis gender equality is in general used as a concept that covers both the numerical aspect of it as well as a describing an equal share of rights and resources. Gender parity is solely defining numerical equality while gender equity is used in the sense of acknowledging the need for mutual respect, dignity and empowerment between men and women. I find Lorber’s (2000) definition on equality and equity useful and believe that this reflect how these concepts are understood in this study.

Arguing for gender equality, we claim that women and men are virtually interchangeable. Taking the stance of gender equity we recognize the physiological and procreative sex differences between females and males, and look for ways to make them socially equivalent (Lorber 2000: 86).

## 4.2 People’s lives as social constructions

While doing research in Cape Town, interviewing students, parents and teachers about how they perceive their lives and social relations, in particular the gendered relations, I discovered that life is to a large extent influenced by a web of social and cultural expectations. Family ties and obligations, cultural and traditional practices, expectations of community and the school all had a great impact on how they viewed their present and future possibilities in life. These observations led me to consider theories emphasising *reality as a social construction* as an important contribution for this study.

The central idea of this theory is that persons and groups are interacting with each other and that these interactions are forming social systems that over time become habitualised and eventually institutionalised as an organised form of human action and behaviour (Berger and

Lückmann 1966). The knowledge produced within these institutions will eventually become embedded in society and experienced as impersonal and objective truths. It will then become the foundation for people's perceptions and beliefs of what is real in life, thus contribute to their definition of what reality is (Berger and Lückmann 1966). In addition, specific roles are produced out from the habitualised activities, which hold particular meanings and positions in which individuals find predictable and defined positions to enter into. The social interaction, and the habitualisation of roles and activities become the process of what is called a social construction; thus "reality is produced, and reproduced through ongoing human activities" (O'Brien 2006: 6). The quote below leaves a good description of how social interaction may be defined within social construct theory:

Interaction is a fluid, intricately coordinated dance that requires actors to participate in meaningful symbolic routines. These interaction routines serve to define who people are, relative to another, and what the situation is. The implication is that social life is a production or performance staged by the participants. Even the self is a social construction arrived at through processes of meaningful interaction with others (O'Brien 2006: 138).

#### **4.2.1 Realities, choices and power**

One of the main assumptions in sociological research is that knowledge and perceptions about yourself and others is not neutral, but a product of subjective and cultural placement (O'Brien 2006), thus dependent on the persons and the context where knowledge is produced. This means that what one person may consider as valid knowledge will not necessarily be recognised by other people that do not share the same cultural and historical background. The idea that social knowledge is subjective rather than objective leads us to the perception that people themselves produce the very framework and patterns of social life they participate in (O'Brien 2006) such as patterns of knowledge and cultural rules and practices which frames our social life. This knowledge provides us with a safe and predictable social world, but, as this study will argue, it might also create limitations and constraints on people's choices and possibilities in life.

The choices we make in life, how we behave and the expectations we have for people around us as are shaped and influenced by the social interaction, the communication and activities that takes place when people are together. O'Brien (2006: 4) argues that "behaviour

is culturally meaningful” emphasising that cultural rules and practices hold a certain meaning that influence how people act and treat each other. Traditions are one example where social rules are produced, and often traditions take form as social arrangements that determine people’s identities and behaviour within the group. As the findings in the next chapter will show, the division of domestic work between boys and girls or the respect youngsters have to show their elders are examples of traditional and social expectations of the individual. One of the main aims of traditions is to keep a social status quo, where predictable hierarchies and expectations are kept valuable (Gyekye 1997, O’Brien 2006). In addition, these hierarchies come with certain power structures characterised by the fact that power is distributed among people in a society, and often with an unequal share of power between different groups.

The common sense of power often tells us that individuals that do not possess or have access to power are most likely to be oppressed by those who do. Thus, power is viewed as repressive means where individuals end up as victims of the exercise of power, as Marxist theory suggests (Mills 2004). Foucault is in his work questioning this traditional view and claims that power is distributed throughout social relations and that it is producing certain behaviour and relations that may be repressive or supportive to the practice of power (Mills 2004). People are not necessarily victims of power but actively contributing to power relations by supporting perceptions and practices that keep these relations alive. This becomes visible in situations where the “weak” part in a power relation participates in rituals and practices celebrating “legitimacy rituals” (O’Brien 2006: 350). An example is the keeping of labels on men’s positions which emphasises their superiority, such as breadwinner or head of family. Another example may be the positive valuing of male initiation ceremony (described in section 5.4.2) from both male and female respondents. These examples may contribute to the assumption that gender inequality persists because both men and women, consciously or unconsciously, support the unequal system by keeping their cultural references (UNESCO 2008).

The strong traditional divide between those that hold power and influence in a society and those that do not is in fact a feature of a social system that is so powerful and influential in people’s lives that it involves a cooperation between the powerful and the weak (O’Brien 2006, Freire 1972). How power is negotiated between people and groups is a key issue in this study, as I lean on the assumption that both the dominant and the subordinate in a social

hierarchy, to a large extent are accepting the role and position they hold, thereby keeping a predictable social order. On the other hand, as Foucault stresses, power is always tested by those that find themselves in the disadvantaged situation, thereby describing power to be in the midst of social struggle (Mills 2004). I believe that the findings in this study illustrate aspects of these notions of power as it shows how power is distributed between men and women in the township of Crossroad, which was described as a crucial factor for the gender conflict that exists, where in particular the contesting of traditional power relations held severe consequences for both sexes.

The sharing of power between men and women is thus highly relevant when discussing gender inequalities in society. It is often expressed by certain discursive truths which are established through prevailing cultural truths and stereotypes that define and perceive women as the weak sex (Mills 2004). By this, self-fulfilling expectations are created that, for example, a woman is not as competent as a man in taking on responsibility or in decision making processes and therefore gets limited access and opportunities to empowerment and independency. Foucault's work on power relations and discourse has been most useful for feminist theorists in their attempt to define and criticise the complex system of power that marginalizes women (Mills 2004). Rather than seeing women as victims, feminists have been able to recognise the language and practices of power that is male dominated. Thus, be able to illuminate and challenge gender inequalities in society. In the next section I will briefly elaborate on how various roles and identities are produced and discuss what kind of processes that are at work, which determines our roles, behavior and positions within family and society. Why do we accept our positions in the hierarchy, apparently so easily?

#### **4.2.2 The process of socialisation**

How power is defined and shared between members in society is most often rigidly structured and determined, turned into objective truths, for example, as a consequence of deeply ingrained traditional practices. Affection and preferences, what we value as important or not important, good or bad behaviour, beautiful or ugly, right or wrong – is grounded in our collective perceptions of how to view things around us (O'Brien 2006). Berger and Lückmann (1966) describe this informal knowledge as *the social stock of knowledge*, which perhaps is the most important frame of reference when individuals are performing their everyday actions and perceptions.



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Our interpretation of everyday life is based on a stock of experience acquired by ourselves or received from other persons such as parents, teachers, etc. This experience in its entirety consolidates itself to form a structured whole, a *stock of knowledge*, which helps us at every step to interpret the world (Klimov 2006: online).

The process of socialization, described as the “ways and processes where an individual is transformed from a biological being into a social being” (Østerberg 2003: 91) is both influenced by and expressed through social interaction where people themselves are negotiating and producing their social world and thereby also defining their personal identity (Berger and Lückmann 1966, O’Brien 2006). In other words, there is no reality or society independent of the human mind and human expression. Humans are, by agreement and cooperation, producing the cultural and social structures they live within, and the possibilities or limitations these structures provide for them (O’Brien 2006). Thus, being a product of their social and cultural contexts.

However, regardless of what kind of contexts individuals belong to, the basic need for being acknowledged and accepted as a full worthy member of the family and community is evident in people’s lives. Situations where social interactions occur become arenas where such acceptance is negotiated and where individuals are able to understand what kind of behaviour that is in line with the expectations the social family has for the individual (O’Brien 2006). To what extent do we then have a free will to decide our way of being and living? I argue in this thesis that there are some limitations to peoples own free will and that these limitations should be examined in order to understand why people behave and choose as they do in life.

The idea that individuals have a free will is also contested by the notion that humans are highly reasonable and pragmatic in their social interaction, and “tend to mould the environment to their own ends” (O’Brien 2006: 52). There exists some deeply and profound connections between the individual and the community they belong to that consciously or unconsciously guide individual choices. There may be economic or materialistic concerns related to a particular life standard, status and reputations related to social positions, or a need for safety and belonging, or just the avoiding of what is unpredictable and unknown. Human pragmatism can be understood as an exchange of human utilities (O’Brien 2006) and ensuring a safe and predictable social life makes people willing to compromise their own needs and wants. Thus, behind a pragmatic choice and a compromise lies an understanding and valuation of a particular context and situation.

Two processes of socialization mark the key point of Berger and Lückmann's (1966) writing on the theory of reality as a social construction. These "levels" describe an important divide between the early childhood and family related socialization and community related socialization that takes place when children grow up and are introduced to people outside of their family, such as teachers, other adults and peers (Berger and Lückmann 1966). The concept of primary and secondary socialisation contributes to this study with a descriptive framework of how humans become social beings and to what extent it is possible to change established perceptions and practices.

### **4.2.3 The primary**

Primary socialisation is the first process of socialisation a human being undergoes. It is through early upbringing that the child becomes a member of society, where they learn about common values, moral standards and preferences. The unwritten and written rules that exist in society, the social stock of knowledge, is internalised during primary socialisation and makes the individual an "expert" on their social and cultural surroundings. Internalisation is a key word in primary socialisation, where "the significant others" (Berger and Lückmann 1966: 151) such as close family members represent certain roles and attitudes that the child identifies with, or in other words, the adults are passing on to the child their established understanding of how to view, value and act in the larger society. Through this process of identification and internalisation the individual shapes its own role and attitudes and becomes a mirrored reflection of their family members (Berger and Lückmann 1966).

In other words, the self is a reflected entity, reflecting the attitudes first taken by significant others towards it; the individual becomes what he [she] is addressed as by his [her] significant others (Berger and Lückmann 1966: 152).

Within the theory of symbolic interactionism, individualism is understood as a "substantive dimension of the self" (O'Brien 2006: 186). This means that identity not only refers to the self, but is also situated in a social context where a person is acknowledged by others. To be given an identity means that you also are given a specific place in the world. In the response from other people your identity is created and your social role becomes clear, thus identity locates a person in social terms.

Again, how a person is negotiating their individual freedom is contested. In particular, in the Western/American ideal of the independent individual a paradox is found. The ideal is that the independent individual is free to choose and create a successful life, able to stand-alone restrained from the requirements and obligations of society. But how can an individual that is a product of a social interaction be able to stand outside of the very same framework in which they are “produced” (O’Brien 2006)? I believe O’Brien is here critically questioning the role of the individual and their ability to just choose another life when realities become difficult. Thus, it may be argued that every person is fundamentally attached to their surroundings and even though there may be a wide space for individual agency, the individual would have to relate to the opportunities and constraints that the society provides. I will now move my attention from primary to secondary socialisation.

#### **4.2.4 The secondary**

Bourdieu’s (1972) notion of habitus gives an interesting perspective to the issue of gender and education because it presents an explanation of how (gender) identity may be influenced in different social arenas (Blackledge 2001). Families and other close members of community are the ones to first and foremost influence what kind of “luggage” of socialisation children will bring with them into the school system. I argue that even though families and the adults living within it are “exposed to” secondary socialisation through, for example, their work life, leisure activities and community obligations, families still create a specific cultural framework based on their history, experiences and situations that represents a primary institution in the socialisation process. The main assumption is that the more different the family culture is from the society culture, the process of secondary socialisation will be more difficult for the individual.

Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society’s social interactions. Increasing evidence show that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable. Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions that underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together (Rankin 2002 in Fennell and Arnot, 2008: 70).

I find the issue of social cohesion in particular interesting in this study. The quote suggests that cohesion is critical for human development, which I interpret in the sense that if the social capital that is required on the different social arenas (for example home and school) is

not matching, the individual may not be able to fully utilize their abilities. This study argues that there is a possibility to reveal such a gap in the home and school arena when it comes to how gender is perceived and practiced and that this creates challenges for the individual as well as the school.

Secondary socialisation differs from primary socialisation by the change of what kind of knowledge that is internalised and how it is internalised, from micro level (family) to the mesa and macro level of the larger society (Berger and Lückmann 1966). The world outside the family is offering a well of different types of knowledge and skills, often institutionalised in the form of particular knowledge, language, symbols and roles. One example of such institutionalised knowledge is education, where the organisation, the hierarchy of authorities, the knowledge, skills and values that students are to learn are non-negotiable and formally structured. Thus, this study questions the consequence of the fact that students come from their home environment carrying a set of references and knowledge and enter a school system that defines and represents definitions of knowledge, skills and values based on how the society and government define it.

According to Berger and Lückmann (1966) there is a weak consistency between the original and the new internalisation of knowledge that leads to a situation where new contents have to be superimposed upon an already existing reality. This contributes to one of the main challenges of secondary socialisation, where the possibilities of introducing new knowledge and values are difficult because the individual already holds a firm definition of reality.

The formal processes of secondary socialisation are determined by its fundamental problem: it always presupposes a preceding process of primary socialization; that is, that it must deal with an already formed self and an already internalised world (Berger and Lückmann 1966: 160).

I argue in this thesis that the distance between the cultural capitals relating to gender norms that the students bring with them to the school is very much different from the political vision in the school about how gender is to be understood. Thus, I find it possible to illuminate evidence of primary and secondary socialisation on gender issues in this study and will discuss this more thoroughly related to the findings in chapter eight. I will now move on and briefly present the capability approach which provides this study with concepts that further illuminates the combination of gender, education, social justice and development.

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### 4.3 The capability approach and human development

Development can be seen as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy (Sen 2000: 3).

The capability approach, with its focus on the well-being of human lives, freedoms and choices, points directly to what should be the key target for development. The approach puts the individual in the centre of development thinking, emphasizing the flourishing of the human being as crucial for democratic and just societies (Sen 2000, Unterhalter and Walker 2007). The capability approach offers an important contribution in development thinking and poverty analyses by turning the focus towards the potential and freedoms each individual holds which is evident for what kind of life they are able to produce for themselves (Sen 2000). The capability approach is thus a freedom-based approach, marking a contrast to the utility-based approach and the resource-based approach which both emphasises a more economic and material assessment of people's life quality (Robeyns 2003, Sen 2000, Walker and Unterhalter 2007). Obviously, it is most easy and accessible to use economic measures, counting income and expenses, looking at material belongings and properties, and from this define a person's life status. This kind of measure has been the main strategy for national and international agencies for decades, but this resource-based approach to the understanding of human well-being is rarely taking into consideration the variations in the important capabilities and potentials people themselves hold (Sen 2000).

Capability theory argues that human beings should be viewed as an end in the development process, and not merely as means to economic growth or social stability (Sen 2000). What needs to be evaluated is to what extent people have "freedoms to be able to make decisions they value and work to remove obstacles to those freedoms, that is, expand their capabilities" (Walker and Unterhalter 2007: 6).

It is important to underline that the capability approach is not a theory but rather a normative framework for development thinking (Robeyns 2002). It explicitly acknowledges the human diversity such as ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, geographical location, whether people have illnesses, physical or mental disabilities in order to look at each and ones potential capabilities. Because of this diversity Sen (2000) argues that capabilities must be context dependent and related to the specific needs and opportunities different contexts require.

That the capability approach is a normative framework for the evaluation of people's well-being, with few specifications for measurement, has led to a discussion whether the selection of capabilities in form of concrete lists is needed (Nussbaum 2000, Robeyns 2002, Sen 2000). Sen (2000) deliberately keeps the capability approach "incomplete" and vague, convinced that a normative framework will ensure real social justice as people themselves must take part and be active agents in the democratic processes when deciding for what life and society they will lead (Walker and Unterhalter 2007). Nussbaum on the other hand argues that a list is needed so that we can have "some idea of what we are distributing, and we need to agree that these things are good" (Nussbaum 1993 cited in Walker and Unterhalter 2007: 13). In addition, the listing of capabilities makes it more adaptable as a political tool for development as well as be expressions of political obligations. Nussbaum has presented a list which covers ten important aspects of human lives: 1. Life, 2. Bodily health, 3. Bodily integrity, 4. Senses, imagination and thought, 5. Emotions, 6. Practical reason, 7. Affiliation, 8. Other species, 9. Play and 10. Control over ones environment (Nussbaum 2000: 78-80).

I find both of these understandings of the capability approach significant for this thesis. I believe that Sen's perspective keeps the capability approach close to what needs to be the core principles of development thinking, namely holding the recognition of the diversity in human lives and the concept of freedom ultimate. However, I do agree with those that claim that for the purpose of being a political tool for development a list is needed in order to be able to evaluate and concretise capabilities that are valuable to achieve. In this study I will lean on both perspectives, discussing gender and education in light of the key principles of the capability approach and suggest certain capabilities for gender equality in education (in the form of a list). I will in the next section give a brief explanation of the key concepts in the capability approach.

#### **4.3.1 Key concepts within the capability approach**

A *capability* is defined as "a person's ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being: [it] represents the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be" (Sen 1993 in Walker and Unterhalter 2007: 2). The word ability relates to the actual opportunities a person has or does not have in order to live the kind of life he or she wants. Opportunities may be created or limited by various and complex factors such as social, historical and

cultural ones and will have a great impact on how people can realize their wants and needs in life (Sen 2000). Economic resources are a crucial factor, but for many people a limited one when it comes to having access to real opportunities such as education, employment, rights. The unfair share of resources is in particular evident when it comes to gender inequalities, especially within marginalized societies, where women are deprived of status, positions and access in decision making processes and self-developing activities such as education or employment, because of established social hierarchies, traditional or cultural obligations and practices (Nussbaum 2000).

Capabilities are understood as the opportunities every individual has for achieving a good life for themselves, while looking for the achieved outcome of these opportunities we have to talk about people's *functionings*.

The difference between a capability and functioning is one between an opportunity to achieve and the actual achievement, between potential and outcome (Walker and Unterhalter 2007: 4).

Functionings are achieved outcomes such as being able to read, to attend school, leisure activities or having a job, while capabilities are the potential, the opportunities each individual has to achieve such outcomes, having been taught to read, being allowed to go to school, living in a society where you have living conditions that are safe and supportive so that the individual can develop the knowledge and skills needed to become a full worthy member of society (Sen 2000). This distinction between functionings and capabilities is very important because evaluating only people's outcomes or functionings may give too little information about how well people are doing, or the reasons behind their level of achievement.

People are equipped with different *capability sets* determined by their economic and socio-cultural backgrounds (Sen 2009). Some have grown up in affluent homes in safe communities, having access to good health services and organised sport activities and attended well-equipped schools that have prepared them for higher education. Some have grown up in non-affluent homes, in unsafe communities, exposed to life-threatening diseases, attended schools where pedagogical resources and ambitions are few and where education after primary level is viewed as a luxury. People with such different stories and capability sets have to relate to the same demands and possibilities society holds for its inhabitants, meaning that there is an unfair share of resources between the advantaged and

the disadvantaged. The fact that some people have access to, while others are deprived of opportunities to live valuable lives describes a social and political injustice between people (Sen 2009). Due to the existence of injustice and inequalities in societies the capability approach requires that we have to evaluate not only the outcomes, but also the real freedoms or opportunities people have available to choose among and to achieve out from (Walker and Unterhalter 2007).

People are recognised to be active rather than passive participants in development (Walker and Unterhalter 2007). This means that individuals are acknowledged to be responsible and dignified human beings who shape their lives in the way they feel important and necessary. These actions are known as *agency* and *freedom* and are the necessary “space” a person needs to make preferable choices and actions. According to Sen (2000) the freedom and possibilities to actively be involved in shaping one’s own life and to reflect upon it is crucial for positive social change. Agency is exercised individually and in cooperation with others and is “instrumentally important for collective action and democratic participation” (Walker and Unterhalter 2007: 6). People that experience a lack of freedom or agency will easily be excluded in, for example, democratic processes or decision-making processes. Thus, it is argued that the potential of agency is dependent on the social structures and capabilities that each person holds. In fact, capabilities, agency and freedom are mutually dependent if successful functionings are to be achieved.

The capability approach correlates with the social construct theory and also Freire’s concept of false consciousness<sup>14</sup> when it critically addresses the concept of agency and the subjective aspect of preferences and choices. According to Nüssbaum (2000), our subjective preferences and choices are not only individually made, but also shaped and moulded by the society. Unequal social, cultural and political circumstances and relations are creating unequal opportunities and chances to choose, and they affect deeply how individuals think, and also their wants, hopes for and beliefs about life (Walker and Unterhalter 2007, Nüssbaum 2000). This influence is so strong that it often leads disadvantaged people to come

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<sup>14</sup> False consciousness is referring to situations where the individual adapts to the dominant and hegemonic forces in society and thereby becomes an actor of the same oppressive means as the individual itself has been exposed to (Mayo 1995).



to accept their situation and subordinate status, and even want to preserve the unfair structures.

The destitute thrown into beggary, the vulnerable landless labourer precariously surviving at the end of subsistence, the over-worked domestic servant working around the clock, the subdued and subjugated housewife reconciled to her role and her fate, all tend to come to terms with their respective predicaments (Sen 1985 quoted in Walker and Unterhalter 2007: 6).

Such adapted preferences may limit the individual's aspirations, hopes and opportunities for the future. By adjusting individual needs and wants to the situations and circumstances that is not safe or constructive we may diminish our freedoms and agency. Thus accepting the role and position given to you by your community may lead you to make choices that are not valuable or life enhancing.

#### **4.3.2 Education as a basic capability**

Education has a central position within the capability approach, viewed as a basic capability that "affects the development and expansion of other capabilities" (Walker and Unterhalter 2007: 8). Defining education as a basic capability places it also in company with a set of other capabilities viewed as fundamental for individual well being, such as being well nourished, having access to shelter and security and to participate in social interaction with others (Sen 2009, Terzi 2007). In addition, education holds a set of potential effects and resources that can contribute to individual life improvements and thereby be able to contribute to societal progress:

Education contributes to interpersonal effects where people are able to use the benefits of education to help others and hence contribute to the social good and democratic freedoms (Sen 1999, in Walker and Unterhalter 2007: 8).

"Education is everything!" was a common expression from the participants in this study, showing a clear conviction about the importance of being educated. Most of the respondents had a focus on the individual benefits of education and they described directly and indirectly the potential effects education may have in terms of changing a person's life financially, socially and personally. I believe therefore it is useful to present how Sen (2000) and other writers describe and differentiate between three potential roles and values that education may

have for individual lives and societies as these perspectives may correlate with the respondents stories and opinions.

First, education has an *instrumental and social role* for people because it contributes to the development of knowledge and skills, such as critical thinking and thereby fosters public debate and dialogue (Sen 2000). This perspective describes the huge range of specific functionings that education may facilitate such as developing academic and practical qualifications (literacy, numeracy, computer skills etc.) that may lead to employment, understanding health issues (such as personal hygiene, physical exercise and protection from STI's and HIV/AIDS) or being able to engage with civil society as well as political processes (Vaughan 2007). To evaluate or measure these potential functionings we might look at the specific content of policies and subjects in education. It is important to include here that to measure exactly how education contributes to a specific outcome (functioning) is not easy because many functionings in life are dependent on other and external factors such as opportunities to practice the knowledge and skills that is gained<sup>15</sup>.

Education has an *empowering and distributive role*, meaning that it gives opportunity to disadvantaged and marginalized groups to organize socially and politically (Sen 2000). Unterhalter and Brighouse (2007) connect this role to a positional value of education suggesting that through education a person may change their position and status from, for example, being unemployed to be employed which generates a greater income and perhaps also a more positive status within the family and community. It is here important to have in mind that not all education may inspire to new positions. The location of the school, the quality of education received and the socio-economic circumstances of the individual may hamper the potential of being educated and hinder a person to change their position in life (Unterhalter and Brighouse 2007).

In addition to the instrumental and positional values of education, we can think about how education can bring greater choice and freedom in a person's life. The *intrinsic value* of education refers to the individual's ability to reason and think autonomously about the situation she or he faces and the options that are available for them (Vaughan 2007). The

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<sup>15</sup> For example: Someone may have the skills to do a specific job, but the freedom to perform these skills are dependent on the availability of jobs (Vaughan 2007).

educated person may have a more rewarding mental life than before being educated. Experiences that the child may have in school like discovering enjoyment for reading literature, solving challenging tasks in maths and science, exploring music and art, and learning social skills such as constructive dialogue and cooperation are achievements that may not lead to instrumental or positional outcomes, but may give the person valuable motivations and inspirations in life (Unterhalter and Brighouse 2007).

The last, but also important aspect of education is its *redistributive role*. Educated members in a family or a social group most likely bring benefits to other members that are not educated, through their knowledge, skills and attitudes (Sen 2000). These distributions of knowledge both instrumental and intrinsic, through informal channels are important aspects of the indirect effects of education and capabilities.

The capability approach is as mentioned a normative framework in which concrete educational outcomes may be identified as capabilities. The table presented below provides one interpretation of how education may enhance capabilities, by participating in education and the capabilities gained through education (Vaughan 2007). The table thus makes a division between the instrumental and intrinsic value of education and provides us some concrete descriptions that will be helpful in identifying capabilities in the forthcoming findings chapters.

**Table 4.1 Well-being and agency achievements and freedoms within, and through formal education**

	<i>Capability to participate in education</i>	<i>Capabilities gained through education</i>
<b>Well-being achievement</b>	<p>“(Educational well-being”)</p> <p>Attending and participating, understanding. Can include basic educational skills such as literacy and numeracy</p>	<p>Contribution of education to other capabilities crucial to general well-being: e.g., employment, health</p>
<b>Agency achievement</b>	<p>“(Educational agency”)</p> <p>Educational aspects that are valued by the individual (e.g., attending school, completing schoolwork, level of achievement in participation, attending a particular school, studying a particular subject</p>	<p>Contribution of education to valued functionings and capabilities: e.g., employment sector, valued level of health, political engagement, family life</p>
<b>Well-being freedom</b>	<p>Ability to choose to attend, participate, understand</p> <p>Barriers and constraints to this freedom in compulsory education</p>	<p>Contribution of education to the freedom to achieve well-being and valued functionings</p> <p>1) Having a range of skills and therefore,</p>

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<b>Agency freedom</b>	Ability to choose to achieve aspects of education valued by the individual Barriers and constraints to this freedom in compulsory education	options 2) Reasoning and autonomous thought; choice and preference formation: - finding out which options are available - ability to reason about options - knowledge of how to overcome constraint to options
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(Source: Vaughan 2007: 119)

This table makes a divide between capabilities in education and capabilities as educational outcome. I believe that both are equally important, but having a main focus on access and participation does not ensure the capabilities that may be gained through education. Being able to reason, to find out which options are available and to have knowledge and skills to overcome constraints in life are capabilities that need a specific focus and pedagogical efforts in order to become real. I will look further into how this focus may be concretised in chapter six.

Acknowledging reason as one of the main outcomes of education has a long tradition within philosophy. John Locke, Immanuel Kant and Jacques Rousseau all developed ideas that describe the important role of education and where reason is a key word coming out from these ideas (Flores-Crespo 2007). If we assume that reason, in the sense of being able to reflect and draw conclusions out from certain assumptions or premises, can be achieved by means of education and that it enhances the opportunities for people to make better lives for themselves then education may certainly be linked to human freedoms and reason defined as a key capability (Flores-Crespo 2007).

I mention reason here also because I find it relevant and interesting when looking into the tradition-modernity divide that is illustrated in this study through the different gender discourses found in school and home. As mentioned in the previous section, traditions are all about preserving thinking, keeping the established ways of interpretation and practices among individuals (Flores-Crespo 2007), and will to some extent be constantly defending itself from the critical attacks based on modern, scientific and political reason. The modern society needs education, as a pragmatic tool, to raise the level of knowledge, values and skills of the population that is required in a steady developing world (Flores-Crespo 2007).

Ultimately, learning is significant in our shaping of powers and capacities and in the developing of individual agency and capabilities (Walker 2007). One such area where education is supposed to convey modern attitudes and critical reflection is on gender; by addressing gender-based inequalities and discrimination and emphasize the importance of gender equality and equity (Nussbaum 2000, Sen 2000). Thus, development, education and gender equality is about social justice and how it is distributed among people in a society. An equal distribution of financial and material resources as well as ensuring equal access to rights, opportunities, protection and aid might be some societal fields where education may have an influence as a mediator of knowledge, skills and values to the population. If these resources are not distributed fairly, that some are excluded from schooling or not able to use their knowledge and skills in real life, they are then less able to participate in the larger society and pursue better lives for themselves. More specifically, the gender gap between men and women's access and holding of resources and the opportunities, which they may have to decide and negotiate those resources, determines their chances for making flourishing lives (Unterhalter 2007). Gender inequalities therefore are one large component in the creation of social injustices in societies and viewing education in relation to this conviction raises some important issues in how education then may be a tool for change. Thus, the capability approach challenges the role of education and relates gender equality and equity and education to more fundamental ideas of solidarity and justice (Fennel and Arnot 2008).

#### 4.4 Summary

In this chapter I have outlined concepts and theories which relate to the main findings in this study. The concept of gender, the theory on reality as a social construction and the capability theory each offer a conceptual framework and a structural understanding which is useful here both in the investigation of each topic (gender, education and development) and when the interrelation of these concepts are to be investigated and understood. Concepts such as power, identity and context are integrated within these theories and are recognised as key factors in the following discussion of findings.

## 5. Exploring gender perceptions and practices in home and community

In the next three chapters I will introduce data from the fieldwork conducted in Cape Town in July/August 2009, as well as discuss these in light of the chosen theoretical frameworks presented in the previous chapter. The analysis of data was done through the process of transcribing the interviews and thereby coding the information into different categories according to the research questions that have guided this study. Out from this process some general groupings of information occurred and these have to a large extent influenced the structure of this thesis, thus, the next three chapters mirror the main findings of my fieldwork. The research questions have therefore not structured this thesis but are subsequently answered throughout the next three chapters in relation to the main categories of findings. I will therefore shortly describe how the research questions is integrated in the following chapters.

This chapter aims to answer the first research question: *How is gender perceived and practiced in the home?* Based on semi-structured interviews with students, teachers and parents a description of the respondents' home and community background in relation to their perceptions and experiences of gender roles and norms will be presented. Chapter six aims to answer the second research question: *How is gender perceived and practiced in the school?* with a description of the schools policy and practice on gender, based on an analysis of policy documents (on national, regional and school level), interviews with the schools stakeholders as well as observation conducted at the research school. Data related to research question three: *How are these gender discourses experienced by the respondents?* will be presented in both chapter five and six as expressions of opinions related to the gender discourses in the home and the school. Finally, research question four: *How do these gender discourses affect the students' perceptions of the future?* has generated information that revealed some of the challenging issues related to the schools role as an agent of change. The gap between gender discourses and the challenges it causes in transferring schools knowledge to the home environment makes out the main focus in chapter seven.

But first, as a point of departure for this chapter that will focus on the respondents home and community related to gender, I find the quote below appropriate as it touches upon the complexity of gender relations and constructions. I believe this chapter will illuminate some of these complexities.

Gender relations are portrayed as the product of substantial identity work, constructed, policed and challenged on and in and through various discursive positioning, such as those pertaining to sexuality, ethnicity, religion as well as through time, space and locality (Arnot and Mac an Ghil 2006: 4).

## 5.1 Descriptions of family backgrounds

The general situation for families within the township of Crossroads is that family relations are greatly challenged by the difficult socio-economic situation. Housing problems, unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse, poverty and domestic violence have severe effects on the functioning of urban families. As a consequence a vast amount of broken families which has led to a high rate of single mother families, no-parent families and orphans that stay with grandparents or other family members in the township. The situation for the students that participated in this study illustrates the general picture. I present briefly their family situations and housing conditions in the following table.

**Table 5.1: The student's family situations**

Students	Family situations	Housing
Zandile (14)	Lives with her mother and twin sister. Father is in Eastern Cape.	Shack
Adele (15)	Lives with her two sisters and brother. Father is dead. Mother lives in Eastern Cape. The siblings run a tavern in Crossroads.	House
Martha (15)	Lives with her mother and father and one elder brother. Father is unemployed, her mother is domestic worker.	House
Vumilo (14)	Lives with her three elder sisters. Both parents died before she was 4.	Shack
Thandiswa (15)	Lives with her mother in her uncle's house. They escaped from her father because of his alcohol abuse and constant fighting.	House

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Angie (15)	Lives with her uncle and aunt. Both parents live in Eastern Cape. She visits them two times a year.	House
Miriam (15)	Lives with her mother and two younger siblings. Her father is absent as her mother divorced him because of alcohol abuse and violence.	House
Nondyebo (16)	Lives with her parents and four siblings. Her father is a contract worker, her mother is unemployed.	House
Lindile (15)	Lives with her elder sister. Her sister is married and has one child. Both parents are dead. Lost two brothers in killings in Crossroads.	House
Steve (16)	Lives alone with his old aunt. His mother died when he was a baby. His father lives in Eastern Cape. Both father and aunt are TB infected.	Shack
Nelson (16)	Lives with his mother and one brother. She is a domestic worker.	Shack
Trevon (15)	Lives with his aunt. She is a domestic worker. Both parents are dead.	Shack
Desmond (15)	Lives with his grandparents. His mother lives in Eastern Cape and his father lives and work in Johannesburg. His grandmother is a traditional healer and his grandfather works as a taxi driver.	House

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This table gives a brief overview of the situation that the students found themselves in. Only two of them had both their parents present, while the others had experienced the loss of one or both parents either to sickness, violence, accidents or by divorce. These are two of their stories:

My mother died when I was two years old. She was sick and shortly after my father died too. I first went to stay with my uncle's family in Eastern Cape, but I was not treated well. My elder sister got me away from them and now I live with my three sisters in one of the shacks here in Crossroads (interview: Vumilo, 03/08/09).

The person I would not like to meet is my father. He broke my heart in such a way that I now think of him as a ruthless someone who thinks of himself only. The story starts in 1991 when my mum and dad got married. After my mother got pregnant with me, my father didn't want to work anymore and he started drinking. He also became violent. My mother managed to tolerate the situation but one day he hit her with a golf stick and hurt her so badly. She decided to divorce him so that she could protect me. Then in 1999 onwards I started a new life experience staying only with my mother (diary: Miriam, 06/08/09).



The students were clearly affected by their different stories and expressed both grief and sadness about their situations. One male student told me that for long after his parents death he “did not know what to say or do, and sometimes I would not be in the mood for people. I didn’t even cope well in school because my life was upside down” (diary: Trevon, 07/08/09). The teachers were well aware of the difficult life situations of the students and one female teacher described the consequences: “The difficult family situations have big, big consequences for the children! The child is failing in class because she is not having the love and support from home” (interview: female teacher C, 04/08/09).

While talking about their background stories the students underlined the importance of having a family and parents that can provide them with protection, advice and support. Statements such as “my sister (guardian) is playing a huge role in my life, she makes all the decisions” (interview: Lindile, 04/08/09) and “my mother and father are both my role models as they give me education, they support me and raise me” (interview: Nondyebo, 11/08/09) underlines the importance of having strong family relationships. The loss of parents was, in addition to be emotional devastating, described as a loss of important guidance in a difficult time of youth.

My father was the only person I could rely on at that time, he was the only parent I had left, my only flesh and blood I had in my life. When you are a boy you need the guardian of a father who will show you how to be a good man (diary: Trevon, 07/08/09).

These quotes about how challenging life becomes when children lose their most significant others contributes to the assumption of family as an important social and emotional security net and socialization factor (Giddens 1991). This issue is complex and deserves much more attention than I can provide here, in order to be dealt with properly and analytically. However, I find it relevant to mention these difficult situations because it gives some insight on which basis families are frameworks of socialization within the research context.

## 5.2 Perceptions of gender

In the planning process of the interviews I became aware that my interpretation of the gender concept is rooted in my academic and cultural background and that I could not take for granted that the respondents would share my perception of gender. Bearing in mind that

general concepts such as gender might be understood and interpreted dependent on various historical and cultural contexts (Fennel and Arnot 2007) I decided to begin the interviews by asking the respondents how they would define and explain gender.

Eventhough the level of reflections around gender issues varied between the participants, they all had family backgrounds and community experiences that in one way or the other influenced their perceptions of gender.

### **5.2.1 Dichotomized labels**

When defining the concept of gender, the respondents often described it in relation to physical/biological features with an emphasis on explaining how power and positions in the family and community are distributed. For example:

Like female are supposed to cook and men is supposed to do the strong work (interview: Martha, 03/08/2009).

A male is the one who produce sperm. He is supposed to be responsible for the family and he is the head of the family. A female is the one who has eggs inside her body and that carries a child for nine months. She is supposed to stay home with the children, looking after the family by means of cooking, washing and other domestic work (diary: Thandiswa, 11/08/09).

Male gender features such as physical strength, authority to decide in social relations and have “power to do what you want” (interview: Lindile, 04/08/09) stands in contrast to the female gender features characterized by being physically weaker, family responsibilities, the role as caretaker and a subordinate family member. Often these characteristics were related to the different jobs men and women are supposed to have. On the question of whether it is possible to cross over gendered work patterns, a common response was marked by skepticism, such as the following quote suggests:

Oh! (Laughter) That would be difficult! A woman working in construction or mines – that would be very difficult. Women should not do this work because they are not capable of that work. They are not strong enough. Men are supposed to do the hard work, and work underground (interview: Miriam, 06/08/09).

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Connell writes that “masculinity does not exist except in contrast with femininity” (1995: 68). The quote above support this view as the perceptions of gender and the male and female role were to a large extent essentialist in their form, pointing to the core of masculinity and femininity. Dichotomized labels such as weak/strong, responsible/irresponsible, active/passive were often used during the interviews, and by this they marked a sharp contrast between the male and female roles and identity.

On the other hand, when probing deeper into the issue of gender, and gender equality/equity in particular, the students would, despite stereotypical gender definitions, in general show opinions and argue that these stereotypes were wrong and that they caused much of the gender inequalities that are seen within their community. Student responses would reflect notions of human rights, such as the need for every human to be treated with respect and tolerance and the importance to obtain justice among men and women. One female student phrased the importance of gender equality like: “Everyone should have the possibility to achieve his or her dreams” (interview: Vumilo, 03/08/09).

This “shift” in how to value gender, switching from acknowledgement of gender equality on the one side and supporting attitudes of stereotyped gender roles, which may limit equal opportunities on the other side gave me the impression that perceptions on gender may not easily be explained, but that it rather is a complex phenomenon to identify, switching between rational and an emotional standpoints. When elaborating on gender in an academic and rationale way, such as asking for definitions of the concept gender equality, their responses were much similar to how the school teaches and practices gender equality: “men and women are supposed to share 50/50 on everything” (interview: Vumilo, 03/08/2009). On the other hand, when they elaborated on gender roles and norms in relation to their home and community, with the basis on their own life experiences, gender perceptions seemed to be more colored by the social and cultural context they come from:

If you are a female there are some things you can't do because you are not a male. For example, women need support because she is the one who have to take care of the children and she has a lot of fear. Men has the power to change because they are strong (interview: Lindile, 04/08/2009).

This quote suggests that the gendered roles are closely attached to power relations between men and women. While women are weak, the men are strong, and by these definitions among others the subordinate/dominant positions in the social order are distributed. The

division of gender into two unequally valued categories is, according to Lorber (2000) one key factor in the production of gender inequalities in the society. Thus, the ordering of men and women in social relations are firmly structured in a pyramidal hierarchy of “power and powerlessness, privilege and disadvantage” (Lorber 2000: 86). Such structures are not easy to break out from or alter because they often are expressed and produced by those closest to us, the family members.

### 5.3 Gendered relations within the family

Within sociology, the family is recognized as one of the most important arenas of socialization processes where gendered roles are produced and reproduced. In order to understand how men and women take on and act on different roles or how they express masculinities and femininities, an exploration of family structures, performances of child rearing, power hierarchies and the division of labor within the family, may give some answers (Connell 1995).

One of the most characteristic features of the family institution is the definition and position of the male and female role which also marks the key notion of how gendered relations are defined in the larger community (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004). The power relations between men and women are rigidly structured in the majority of known cultures in the world, where the general picture worldwide is that women’s primary concern is in childrearing, providing food and water and maintenance of the home while political, financial decision-making processes as well as military and physical demanding jobs are male dominated (Giddens 1993).

As described above, the students had experienced challenging family situations with the consequence that they today lived in quite different family constellations. The students thus experienced to live in either female- or male headed households. This came to be an important difference in how they explained gender practices in their homes when it came to the positions of family members, how domestic work was shared and how the upbringing of children were performed.

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In families that were more “traditionally” structured and run by a male person, the respondents described a different situation whereby expectations on behavior, work responsibilities and their place within the social hierarchy is strictly divided by traditional gender norms. One of the girls gave this description of her family:

R: My dad is the head of the house and is in control of many things and my mum... My dad is employed and is the breadwinner in the family while my mother is the one buying things and is in the control of the house.

Q: If your mother would like to work, would she be able to do that?

R: My mum wants a proper job, but my dad does not want her to have a proper job. As I say, they keep their traditional values. He says he is the head of the house so he should take care of everything in the house so he doesn't allow her to have a proper job (interview: Nondyebo, 11/08/09).

Another female student also explained the strict gendered structure in her family:

My father makes the decisions in my family! This is because, well, it comes from a long time ago, like in the rural areas the man is the one that should make the decisions and a woman shall just agree to what the man says. So it is my father who makes the decisions (interview: Martha, 03/08/09).

These quotes suggest that there are certain positions distributed within this family, and that the dominant and powerful role is placed with the father. The mothers seem to have limited opportunities to negotiate personal needs and will regarding decision making or taking on a paid job. In addition, these quotes suggest that this practice is coming out of some traditional values. The gender practice that is exemplified in this quote correlates with how other descriptions of gender practices that is common within traditional Xhosa families (Telschow 2003). The role of the man as the protector of his family is somehow connected to a “God similar perception” (Afolami, n.d.), a phrase that may describe someone with an unquestionable power and position. In order to facilitate this role a man has to play out certain acts such as avoiding housework or other tasks regarded as women's jobs.

The male dominance in its structured form which is described above is defined as patriarchy. This concept links to the concept of a patriarch, a societal male elder that has legitimate power over others (usually younger men, women and children) in the social unit (Connell 1995, Giddens 1993, Pilcher and Wheelahan 2004). Patriarchy in a South African context is deep-rooted historically to the sense of being viewed as a “natural” custom. In particular, among men, patriarchy is not much questioned or contested as this would be undermining

their position as head of the family, as well as their dominant positions within the larger society (Koopman 1997, Morrell 2005).

A general pattern emerged from the student's descriptions of gendered relations in their families, showing that male headed households would be more traditional than female headed households. In the female headed households the students experienced that they had to take responsibilities and tasks in the house regardless whether the tasks were gender defined.

My mother treats me differently and I have to cook and clean the house. She wants me to be independent and be able to run my own household one day. If I had a father he would have refused that (interview: Nelson, 04/08/09).

This quote suggests that the motivation for sharing the domestic work was that the boy one day could be able to take care of his own household. I believe the quote also confirms what has been described above, that male-headed households would be more traditionally run. Within such families the boys would not been allowed to do domestic tasks. The next quote shares a similar perception of the difference between male- and female headed households:

My aunt makes the decisions in my family. We are sharing the house work; we are four boys and two girls. If my uncle had been here it would be very different, and he would have treated us differently (interview: Trevon, 07/08/09).

These stories may suggest that the organizing of the household was more flexible in female headed households than what was described in male headed families regarding traditionally gender divided house work. One possible explanation for these differences may relate to the vast social challenges in the township, described above, which leads to the high rate of broken families. Single mothers and female guardians often have to take on what traditionally have been considered as male responsibilities and tasks such as becoming employed, earning money, and thereby being a breadwinner in order to take care of their children. Being alone with the responsibility for having an income and raising the children may change the running of households towards what seems to be a more cooperating unit rather than the more traditional gender divided household.

Eventhough the respondents experience both traditional and less traditional family structures they showed a strong awareness of the fathers' authority and how a father would have

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rejected such a flexible work sharing arrangement in the home. I suggest therefore that the students described a contradictory situation where they experience with their mother that domestic work is shared equally, but only to a certain point and as long as the father was not present. Thus, their perceptions of gender roles and the traditional dominant/subordinate positions of the family members were evident even though they lived in more flexible households.

Recalling the elaboration on social construction theory in chapter four, the formation of a person's identity is regarded as an outcome of primary socialisation (Berger and Lückmann 1966, Giddens 1991, O'Brien 2006). Primary socialization means the process during the individual's early childhood where he or she is entering a social world and becomes aware of their position and role within the social group. Thus, one of the key notions within primary socialisation is that the transformation from a biological to a social being is situated within a social context which specifically influences a person's identity (O'Brien 2006). Berger and Lückmann (1966) label those closest in the primary socialisation process as "significant others", referring to for example family, peers and neighbours. Through the transference of cultural codes, language, emotional and cognitive thinking the child's identity is a reflection of contextual, social and cultural elements (Berger and Lückmann 1966).

These assumptions were somehow confirmed by the respondents and some of them claimed that children are prepared for adult life through the various expectations and requirements they meet from their parents where they are taught early the gendered roles and mindset they shall adopt once they have reached youth and adult life.

It goes with the upbringing! The way you are brought up by your family, that the man shall provide for the women, that the father is the head of the family and the mother is the one that "keeps the fire burning"<sup>16</sup> (interview: female teacher B, 18/08/09).

That gendered roles and relations are transferred through the upbringing of the child was a shared view amongst the respondents. Statements like: "If you are a girl in this culture, you must stay home and help your mother with the house work "(interview: Thandiswa, 11/08/09) and: "Parents speak more roughly and strict to the girl, being more protective

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<sup>16</sup> Used as an expression for women's responsibility for the household.

towards her while the boy can come to the house and do as he wants” (interview: Nelson, 04/08/09), supports the general description of how traditionally defined gender roles are reproduced through the upbringing of children.

According to Berger and Lückmann (1966) upbringing is an inflicted process upon the child where its identity to a large extent is determined by the first socialisation process found within the family.

In other words, the self is a reflected entity, reflecting the attitudes first taken by significant others towards it; the individual becomes what he (and she) is addressed as by his (and hers) significant others (Berger and Lückmann 1966: 152).

This quote suggests strongly that in the process of being an individual the child’s identity is shaped through its interaction with others. I interpret this quote from Berger and Lückmann to present a somewhat deterministic view of primary socialisation, showing less trust to the individual self in influencing their own life and perceptions. Some of the responses from the students might support the view of upbringing as a strong inflicted process where the individual self is a reflection of their significant others (parents), in particular when they spoke of the boys in the community.

Yes, the boys get their inspiration from their fathers. They copy what they do. Let’s say that the father is the head of the house, the boy would say that he is the man in the relationship, even though he is not (interview: Angie, 04/08/2009).

This quote suggests that the boys may use the dominant position of their fathers as a means to get influence and power in their own relations. It may then also suggest that even though the boys are operating on their own agenda, they seek legitimization in their father’s behaviour and status for their actions. I find O’Brien’s quote below illuminating as she suggests that there is a two-sided situation where individuals on the one hand are engaged in social life on premises they may influence, but on the other hand are influenced on some pre-determined patterns of social behaviour:

Social life is conceived as a dynamic web of reciprocal influences among members of a social group. This web is made up of the interactions of individuals. Individuals spin and respin the web. At the same time, they are influenced by the existing patterns of previously spun strands (O’Brien 2006: 62).



That the socialisation process is complex and not easily defined into one or the other perspective is evident. I believe that the participants in this study described their social life as diverse, where they were exposed to both traditional and modern cultural influence, close family relations and distanced family relations, having close friendships and experiences of loneliness. Thus, their social network was diverse and not homogenous. However, they described a quite similar and general picture of a home and community environment that related closely to what may be defined as traditional values and rules. In the next section I will present data that illustrates how some of the traditional rules were expressed in the interviews.

### **5.3.1 Expectations and social control**

We see ourselves in terms of our relationships to other people (social roles), and we evaluate ourselves in terms of cultural expectations (O'Brien 2006: 57).

O'Brien (2006) suggests with this quote that people are highly influenced by the social group they belong to. We somehow mirror ourselves in others and thereby find out whether we are doing things right or wrong, if we are good or bad individuals. This acceptance is important for us because it can provide a predictable and secure social framework, rather than conflicts and exclusion. Thus, the norms and expectations we meet from others define our role and position within the social group (Connell 1995).

The respondents described social expectations to be related to particular duties and responsibilities as well as certain requirements of behavior. The girls to a large extent described expectations connected to typical female values: "My mum wants me to be a wise woman, to be prepared to keeping a house and a family" (interview: Thandiswa, 11/08/2009) and "we expect of women that they are loving and caring" (interview: Vumilo, 03/08/2009). The boys on the other hand spoke more detailed about the social pressure they felt outside of the home when it comes to prove their manhood and strength: "You know, the peer pressure is very strong. The boss would say that you have to fight and do crime etcetera, and if you don't you will be called names, that you are gay for example" (interview: Nelson, 04/08/2009).

The adult respondents were to a larger extent much more explicit when we discussed gendered expectations, and immediately connected it to a strong performance of social control within the family and community. One male teacher said that his family would not accept any deviance from the expected conduct, the ABC in how to do things, or he would face punishment:

Even in my home my father is expecting of me how to behave etc and you can't confront them. They would gather the family and then all of them would be against you, and exclude you. They would do a certain ritual etc. So if you confront them, they would say no to that. In our family we have the ABC in how to do things, and if you don't do this ABC you will be punished (interview: male teacher A: 12/08/09).

This quote suggests that even if a person wants to challenge tradition, the extended family puts pressure on individuals to comply with expectations related to their roles. According to Berger and Lückmann (1966) control mechanisms in social institutions (such as families or communities), are products of the dialectical relationship between the individual and the social world, thus recalling that keeping the social order is one key characteristic of traditions (Gyekye 1997). Even though humans are the ones to produce their social world the institutionalization of social activities and behavior becomes objectified in the form of being “given, unalterable and self-evident” (Berger and Lückmann 1966: 77). If social groups can act and rule as natural given truths and not being flexible and open for adjustments according to the individuals that enter it, the social group has established a firm structure which is difficult to question. The objectified reality, in the sense of rules and practices that is valued as not questionable nor contested, thus becomes a social control mechanism (Berger and Lückmann 1966).

The respondents gave examples of sanctions linked to social control that would have a major influence on their way of living, such as the quote above described. Being socially and physically excluded from the family or community was described as the most common punishment if the expected behavior did not occur. Another response would be public harassment by neighbors or family members as they would use “bad names” and by this denigrate the person. The next quote shows a dialogue between me and one of the male teachers where he describes what kind of reactions he could face if he contested traditional gender roles:

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Q: What kind of response would you get if you took on a “modern” role towards your future wife, and actually did cooperate and share the daily responsibilities with her?

R: Ahh... (laugh) Bad... Our neighbours still believe that men should not being under...<sup>17</sup> Yes, they would look at you, and say that you are been controlled, and things like that.

Q: Would it be difficult to resist reactions like that?

R: Yes, it would be difficult of course.

Q: Would you say that there is a strong social control in your community?

R: Yes, it is still strong! It is still there, and it is hampering the progress of gender equality (interview: male teacher B, 11/08/09).

As discussed in the theory chapter the one main objective for the performance of social control and sanctions is to maintain positions and structures that determents people’s behavior and activities, thus keep the established hierarchy of power and influence (Berger and Lückmann 1966, O’Brien 2006). In addition, I believe that in order to understand social control, it is important to identify who or what initiates social control, that the objective world in fact is performed by someone and that most likely there are certain people who benefit from the established order.

In the context of this study, the institutionalization of behavior and social interaction may be identified within the patriarchal family structure and the strict gendered definitions that exist within the Xhosa community (Morrell 2005, 2006). The patriarchal institution guarantees authority and influence to the married men, and become thus beneficiaries of the patriarchal structure, where women and children are less privileged or acknowledged as full-worthy members of the group (Wolf 1997). Some of the respondents were also concerned with the fact that gender inequalities persist because the dominant part is secured privileges through this “system”.

The traditional law is accepted, even though it is wrong. If the men say that they shall decide, they will do that. The situation is not right, but most of the traditional men they like it because they benefit of that system (interview: male teacher A, 12/08/09).

The protection of privileged positions may be one relevant explanation on the practice of social control (Wolf 1997) and is relevant for this study as I believe that such expectations

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<sup>17</sup> By “being under” he probably means to have a weaker position within the family hierarchy than the woman.

and social control will have an impact on the creation and shaping of gendered perceptions and opinions with the respondents.

Another element in the keeping of male dominance in family relations may be connected to the recognition of this dominance by the other family members. One of the female guardians I interviewed lived within a traditional marriage. In her quote below she describes her marriage as being firmly structured by a traditional share of power and influence.

It will never change that men are the head of the family, but they also need us as the neck. There is never a head without the neck. So I come with my suggestion, if he don't like it he will tell me no, and I will see that his idea is better. But sometimes my suggestion is taken (interview: Guardian A, 26/08/2009).

I interpret this quote as an expression of acceptance, or agreement of how the positions within this family are distributed. She describes her and her husband's role as harmonised, holding different but yet important positions in the family structure. I find this interesting and think that this description might be an expression of how O'Brien emphasises that behaviour is connected to what is perceived as "culturally meaningful" (O'Brien 2006: 4) as well as connecting to the notion that power is negotiated by both the dominant and the subordinate within a social hierarchy (Freire 1972, O'Brien 2006). How we perceive our lives and what might be sources for a proud and meaningful integrity is grounded in our collective perceptions. Traditions are deeply ingrained beliefs and practices and thus become one influential factor in how social interaction, the participant's roles and activities are interpreted in such a way that it is experienced as meaningful and logic. The need for being accepted and to have a say within the social group might be strong motivations for the individual behaviour. Power relations are often expressed through discursive truths and stereotypes which often define the women's role as weak compared to the male role (Mills 2004). Such "truths" may turn into self-fulfilling expectations where the subordinate may not want to challenge the situation, but rather adjust to and even support it. I believe there are strong socio-cultural implications for such choices connected to the social expectations and social control in the community.

In this section I have shown how some of these arrangements of expectations and control have been described for me. In the next section I will look briefly into how traditions may legitimise these arrangements.

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### 5.3.2 “Everything is legitimised by tradition”

The concept of tradition is often used as a contradictory term in relations to modernity. Tradition is often tied to images of something that is rural, agrarian, resistant to change and innovation and bound to beliefs and practices that are “handed down from the past to the present” (Gyekye 1997: 219). As a contrast, modernity is characterised by something urbanized, innovative, future oriented and scientific. However, this dichotomy raises some critical questions because all societies are in processes of change and all societies do value and practice some traditions, thus, “the one does not exclude the other” (Breidlid 2003; 38). According to Gyekye (1997) the values and practices of traditions are not transferred automatically nor are they being static or unchanging over time. Instead traditions are revitalised and consciously adapted by every new generation, choosing which values and practices that is appropriate to bring on or leave behind (Gyekye 1997). Thus, traditions may be understood as flexible and most likely a product of time and space (Breidlid 2003).

In the township of Crossroads the Xhosa culture is the dominant identity marker together with an urban lifestyle, which I believe serves as important elements in the respondent’s sociological framework. Often during the interviews the participants referred to their culture, traditions, practices and beliefs that are brought from their original home places, the rural areas in Eastern Cape, when they explained how gender was perceived by family members.

Yes, according to us black people, according to the way we used to live, this (gender roles) is coming from our forefathers, the men’s mindset of the individual. (...) So they value a woman as someone who is weak, sensitive and not as strong as the men (interview: female teacher A, 03/08/09).

This quote implies that both the identification of gender roles and the expected behaviour of men and women seems to be tied to traditional practices and by referring to these traditions certain roles and positions are legitimised even though they are discriminating and oppressive.

We can go back to the tradition again! If a man beats a woman the woman is not supposed to do anything about that, the woman is just supposed to stay and do nothing. She must not fight back; she must not go for help. The man will just beat her. This is very complicated. Everything is legitimized by tradition (interview: Martha, 03/08/09)!

This quote suggests that women who face domestic violence will have few options to escape this situation because according to the tradition a man is entitled to use violence on his wife and she is supposed to tolerate it and live with it. “You know women in our culture are treated like children! They can’t argue back or they are beaten. And women are even afraid of being killed” (interview: principal, 18/09/2009).

How traditions may legitimise unjust practices can be seen in light of what Berger and Lückmann (1966) call the social stock of knowledge. This concept implies that a group of people share a common knowledge which includes, for example, cultural codes, roles and experiences, rituals, language and social norms and that this knowledge frames people’s perceptions of what is accepted and not. In particular, the language as the sign system may be interesting to look at because it also reflects how certain positions and behaviour are valued. Language becomes “both the basis and the instrument for the social stock of knowledge” writes (Berger and Lückmann 1966: 86). I think that these writers point to an important factor when it comes to how language and labels may be used in the valuation of social behaviour and that through the use of positive and negative labels certain positions are confirmed and strengthened. As a small example, on two occasions I spoke informally with some of the participants about how men and women were labelled differently. While men are referred to as *the head* of the house or the *breadwinner*, it was rather difficult to find any similar positive labels on the female role in the family. The response was that this was nothing they had been thinking of, but that they agreed that there was a discrepancy in how men and women are labelled, in favour of the male status. I believe that such labels are important to reflect upon, and that they may confirm how social positions are valued.

Both through labels and in general descriptions, the male role in social relations, within the family and in the community was a recurrent theme and crucial in the description and explanation of how gender is structured and performed within the township. Two contrasting views on how manhood is perceived and experienced will be presented in the next section.

## 5.4 Masculinity as cultural representation

To start with, masculinity is defined as the set of social practices and cultural representations associated with being a man (Morell 2006). Masculinity has some cross-cultural

characteristics related to a dominant ideal of masculinity centered on authority, physical toughness and strength, heterosexuality and work (Pilcher and Wheelahan 2004). I believe these labels are recognizable in this study as well, through the participant's descriptions of the traditional male role in the previous sections. However, masculinity is also a construct of specific historical and cultural contexts, and may therefore be identified and performed differently from place to place (Connell 1995, 2000, Pilcher and Wheelahan 2004).

Masculinity is somehow possible to define in general terms, yet it is important to remember that the status and the performing of masculinity are differently distributed among men globally and locally, and thereby makes it necessary to operate with several definitions of masculinity (Connell 1995). Positions within the social hierarchy, age, material or financial resources, educational level and marital status may affect the masculine status of a man and his access to power and influence (DAW 2008). Thus, the social location and the cultural context provide the opportunity, or set the limits, of how masculinities are perceived and performed (Bhana 2005).

It is not all men who threaten peace, democracy and harmony, but rather particular constructions of masculinity that legitimate the use of violence, the undemocratic assertion of power and the rights of men over women and children (Morrell 2005)<sup>18</sup>.

I regard this quote from Morrell to be a key in how to understand masculinity. He suggests that gender-based inequalities and discrimination must be seen in relation to how masculinity is constructed within societies and thereby move the focus from the individual to the social structures that legitimate men's superior position. This I believe is crucial in the building of well-functioning relations between men and women. In the next two sections two different perspectives of how masculinities were spoken of by the respondents will be presented.

#### **5.4.1 Contesting manhood**

The situation many women face within traditional family structures were characterised by a disadvantaged situation compared to men and where patriarchal family structures legitimises this situation. Thus, women are in many instances left with few opportunities to negotiate

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<sup>18</sup> As this is a web site reference no page number is specified.

unjust practices and few options in order to make choices based on personal needs (Breidlid 2002a, Nussbaum 2000, UNFPA 2000).

Some men they just take the advantage, because in many families there is only the father that is working, maybe the mother is not working and then, obviously, the mother is dependent on the father. So they want our mothers to obey their rules whereas our mother is dissatisfied, because if she will leave, she will not have any option, any money, she will suffer so they ... like, I don't know. The men force our mothers to do things that are not satisfactory because they know they are unemployed (interview: Lindile, 04/08/09).

This quote suggests that women find themselves in unacceptable relations deprived of the ability to protect themselves or to become independent. Money as an oppressive mean is not new, where those that hold the finances also hold certain power over other people and in South Africa in general, women constitute the poorest group and are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed (National Gender Policy Framework, n.d). This puts them in a vulnerable position that is strengthened by a subordinate and dependent relationship to men. In a patriarchal society such as that reflected in the Xhosa family structure, it is the man in the house that is financially responsible and thereby has the defined power. For women, to be empowered in life will involve financial independence from men.

The one thing that makes men powerful in the house is money. Everyone has to beg to him. If the woman can earn her own money and be able to provide for herself, no one can control her (interview: female teacher B, 18/08/09)!

Being financially independent was seen as the most important asset for women to gain empowerment and thereby contest the traditional gender roles of domination/subordination. What seems to be a severe conflict between men and women is triggered by, in particular, a high level of unemployment which may be a fundamental push factor for many of the social problems in the community such as abuse of alcohol and drugs, domestic violence and an apathy amongst many men (Connell 1995, UNFPA 2000). As a consequence, many women do not have a choice but to leave their husbands in order to take care of their children and themselves.

Men are not important if they can't make your life nice. Like when I was working he was drinking and stealing things in the house and sell it. And if they just want to fight... Miriam was a little girl when she saw us fighting. So I took the decision to divorce him. I couldn't manage... (interview: mother, 26/08/2009).



This informant describes a situation where she had to leave her husband because of his lack of responsibility and violent behavior. Her story may illustrate what seem to be a growing tendency in the township that women, because of their broken marriages have to become financially independent in order to take care of themselves and their children. Women are thus left few opportunities but to empower themselves:

The urban setting is harsher<sup>19</sup>. And just like the hen that has to take care of her chicken, so needs a women to take care of her children. If there is nothing for dinner and the man is just sitting there, not taking any initiative, it is the women who has to provide (interview: principal, 18/08/2009).

How women provide for their family is often by taking on low paid jobs, usually domestic work or by selling things in the street in order to pay rent, food and clothes. Or by just managing on the government child grant of 240 Rand a month for each child, as was the situation for the single mother I interviewed. The fact that many women become the breadwinner in families has challenged men's position in the family and in the community, and sadly with the effect of an intensifying level of domestic violence (Bredlid 2002a, Connell 1995, Nussbaum 2000). The next quote supports this view that men are becoming disempowered, and even de-masculinized by female efforts in taking on responsibility. As a reaction, men use their physical power to gain their position and status.

I think it is a feeling of insecurity among men, while the women feel a sense of freedom, having money. So the men feel inferior you know if the woman can do what she wants to do. And if the women are working and provide for the children, the men would say that you are independent and much better off and that you don't need a husband. That is when the abuse starts (interview: principal, 18/08/2009).

Based on the interviews, both personal stories as well as the general description of women's harsh realities in the township I got the impression that their empowerment and actions for independence was just as much thrust upon them, as it is a choice of free will. In a situation where a family is facing severe lack of basic resources, and the husband is not able or willing to take his responsibility, are women left with no choice but to protect themselves from abuse and to take action in order to survive?

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<sup>19</sup> This informant suggests that life is harsher in the urban areas than in the rural areas.

Let me tell you about the South African man! (Laughing) We mothers, bring our children up alone, the fathers don't take care of their children. This is the main problem. Most children live with their grandmothers because the parents are abandoning them. (...) In rural areas they are more attached to their children, but not here in the urban areas, no! But fortunately the urban women are strong and educated and can take care of their kids (interview: female teacher B, 18/08/2009).

Empowerment and the need to be independent from others, in particular men, was described as one of the most important skills to have as a woman because "in the end of the day you stand alone" (interview: Vumilo, 03/08/2009). Thus, suggesting that independence was seen as an important quality to have. This was in particular expressed when their future plans were described such as: "I don't think I will get married. Maybe I will change my mind, but I don't want to be treated as my father treated my mother" (interview: Miriam, 06/08/2009). Most of the female students and the female teachers that were not married did not include a man in their future family life on the grounds that a man would expect her to live a traditional married life, thus deprive her of her independence and freedom:

I don't want to get married because I don't want to be controlled by anyone. I just want to be on my own, be independent. If I got married that person would want to have children with me, and that is not what I want. I want to be educated and to be a pilot" (interview: Angie, 04/08/2009).

The next quote from one of the student's mother may show some reflections on the risk women may feel in having a relationship with a man.

If you got a boyfriend and he is not treating you nice and he don't like you anymore then you should go. You can't stay with someone that doesn't like you. That is why I separated with Miriam's father, because I saw that he would change my life with his drinking and beating. I am grateful, I thank God for what I have and that I manage to buy food. Now I don't want even a boyfriend, I just want to take care of my children (interview: mother, 26/08/2009).

A general picture was drawn on how girls and women view relationships with men, with the expression of what I understood as an uncompromising attitude, which made me wonder on what grounds equality and equity between men and women then can be built? The evidence of female empowerment and the contesting of the traditional male role seemed to be strong according to the participants in this study. However, understanding gender equality as a fair share of responsibility and opportunities between men and women, I got the impression that

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the empowerment of women is coming out of a conflict situation rather than being an expression of gender equality based on sustainable relations.

#### 5.4.2 Celebrating manhood

*Children reaching the age of puberty are like freshly dried jackal skins which have to be tanned and cut to size, otherwise they become hard and useless. When we make the bread, the flour, yeast and water have to be kneaded thoroughly, again and again. In the same way, during the phase of puberty the ingredients of life are brought together for our children. This takes place at the initiation school where they are kneaded thoroughly, again and again, so that the bread becomes crisp, fresh and good (Telschow 2003: 43).*

The initiation ceremony, Vkwaluka<sup>20</sup>, is an important mark from childhood to adulthood. Although Xhosa culture has a ceremony for girls as well, it is the ceremony for the boys that stems out as most prominent. The initiation is in practice compulsory for boys since a choice of not going through the ceremony will create strong negative reactions from other family and community members, and you may not be considered to be a man before you have passed the ritual tests (Telschow 2003).

The initiation ritual is a process of becoming a man. Included in this process is also to learn how a man is supposed to relate to women and children and how respect and acceptance is to be achieved within the family and community. Thus, it may seem that Vkwaluka plays an important role in the construction of manhood in the township.

Earlier in this chapter, the respondents have described traditional beliefs and practices as legitimising factors when it comes to gender inequalities, where men are identified as the ones who create most of the violence and insecurity in the township. Some respondents used expressions like “irresponsible” (interview; Vumilo, 03/08/09) and even “useless” (interview: female teacher B, 18/08/09) in their descriptions. Having this in mind I found the respondents positive valorisation of the traditional manhood celebration to be a contrast to the previous statements. The ceremony was even described with a sense of nostalgia and as a

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<sup>20</sup> The initiation process takes approximately 5 weeks and includes various tests such as being able to tolerate hunger, isolation and pain in order to prepare the youth for manhood. Boys that are between 16-18 years old are expected to participate in the ceremony (Telschow 2003).

symbol for “the beauty of the past” (interview: female teacher B, 18/09/08). One male student described the initiation as an important transformation from boyhood to manhood.

As a boy we need to go through circumcision so that we can become a man, and do things as our fathers. Then you can have your own family. They want you to follow themselves (parents) so that we keep the name of the family, to keep our traditions (interview: Nelson, 04/08/09).

I believe this might illustrate some of the complexity that the relationship between tradition and modernity creates (Breidlid 2002, 2003, Breidlid and Stephens, n.d., Gyekye 1997). On one hand tradition represents a group’s cultural roots as it initiates, for example, collective celebrations based on common values, such as the initiation ceremony, and thereby creates a sense of cultural belonging (Giddens 1993). On the other hand, tradition is contested by the “modern” society characterised by other definitions of the individual as well as gender relations. People in the township of Crossroad find themselves in a situation where both traditional and modern worldviews are present and established male identities are contested by the larger society (Breidlid 2002a, 2003). All of the respondents in this study regarded men to be the main keepers of the Xhosa culture, in particular, when it comes to the practice of traditional gender roles: “growing up with a father would make my relation to the traditional culture stronger. I then could seek the older men for the cultural things” (interview: male teacher B, 11/08/09).

The contesting and the celebrating of manhood may express what Gyekye (1997) argues, that traditions are purposefully chosen regarding what values and practices that are appropriate to bring on or leave behind. Considering that men seemingly are the benefitters of patriarchy when it comes to being powerful and privileged, it is reasonable that they are also the ones who are motivated to hold on to this system. Women are the contesters, when they are able to be so, because they either have to protect themselves from a disadvantaged situation and/or because they don’t benefit socially and financially from such relations.

## 5.5 Summary

This chapter has attempted to provide a contextual reflection for this study based on descriptions and reflections of how gender is perceived and performed within the home and community context of the respondents. A web of influential factors has been introduced for

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the purpose of illuminating the intersectionality of gender based on the respondents' perceptions, experiences and opinions (Cole 2009).

The respondents' *perceptions* of gender roles, stereotypes and patriarchy seem to be rooted in both their traditional and cultural background, but also that the traditional gender practices were reasoned to be wrong. I believe the next chapter will suggest that the students reasoning is much based on the "modern" values found in the school and in the society. Perceptions of gender norms are closely connected to the *social practices* and are illustrated in this chapter in the form of how work and responsibilities in the home are gender divided. *Cultural ideologies* are seemingly influential on gender relations and may take form as social expectations and social control mechanisms, described by most of the respondents in this study as being decisive for individual behavior and ability to act according to other beliefs. Together with *institutional arrangements* such as the celebration of the male initiation ceremony, it seems that the traditional gendered norms are expressed overtly and with a general and common acknowledgement.

Some contrasting voices have expressed a deviation from the established beliefs and practices. Female headed households are contesting the gender division in domestic work, sharing the tasks equally between the girls and the boys. Female empowerment in the form of taking on paid jobs, leaving abusive and irresponsible relationships in order to take care of themselves and their children show that women hold aspirations and strengths even though they face disadvantaged situations. These are valuable and amazing examples. However, the respondents claimed that the flexible practice would have been rejected if a male adult had been present. Traditional gender norm stand firmly eventhough some practices are changed. In addition, the notion of female empowerment is contested and met with increased violence from men, thus forcing women to leave and take double responsibility for raising children and providing for their basic needs.

Having brought up some aspects of how the participants in this study describe and experience gender norms and practices in their home/community context, I will now move my attention towards the school and try to find out how the school approaches gender issues and what efforts the school makes related to gender equality.

Two preliminary questions are asked: What kind of role does the school play as an agent of change in a local context where gender insensitive practices take place? Does education aim to build the required capacities so that the students may live the life they value in the future?

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## 6. Exploring gender discourses in education policy and practice

This chapter intends to describe how gender equality and equity is understood and outlined within South African education. Based on the readings related to education in South Africa in the Master program in Multicultural and International Education at Oslo University College, (Breidlid 2002, 2003, Breidlid and Stephens, n.d., Christie 2004), I went into this study with the assumption that I would find an education system similar to what I know from Norwegian schools when it comes to pedagogical thinking, learning principles and essential values. I was, however, more uncertain about to what extent the concepts of gender equality and equity were addressed in schools, whether they would be overtly expressed within a certain discourse or perhaps neglected?

In this chapter I will present findings from policy documents, observations and interviews and I believe that these three sources will give a picture of the schools efforts and approaches on gender equality and equity. The capability approach is chosen as a normative framework for this task because its key concepts relate education and gender to larger development thinking. I believe it is valuable to bring up again some of the core ideas of this approach before moving on to the policy framework.

### 6.1 Education, gender and capabilities

The capability approach recognizes the school as one of a “relatively small number of centrally important beings and doings that are crucial to well being” (Sen 1992 in Walker and Unterhalter 2007: 8). Education is viewed as one key contributor to the flourishing of human lives because it provides knowledge and skills to people and thereby enables them to participate in public life, to be employed and to recognize their rights. Thus, education is understood as a basic capability that enhances other capabilities. Unterhalter and Walker underline the importance of education as:

Having the opportunity for education and the development of an education capability expands human freedoms. Not having education harms human development and choosing and having a full life (2007: 8).

This quote suggests that access to education is crucial in order for people to achieve human development. The individual benefits of education relate to the opportunities people have to live the life they value, to achieve actual functionings which enable them to improve their life situations and thereby become crucial in societal progress as well (Sen 2000). The quote above also suggests that unequal accesses in education produce inequalities in individual growth. This is a concern that the global educational discourse has taken seriously for years, emphasizing that equal numbers of boys and girls in academic achievements and social activities ensures gender equality in education (Holmarsdottir forthcoming, Walker 2007). However, in the capability approach the concept of equality is not only tied to parity, but is closely tied to social justice and welfare which may cause “the aggregated benefits for the whole society and the future generations” (Unterhalter 2007: 97).

The conviction of education as an equally important value for both boys and girls lives take us behind the “numbers game” and asks us to evaluate gender equality out from other criteria than counting how many boys and girls there are within the various educational activities. Are boys and girls for example equally able to practice and perform what they learn? Are they equally able to utilize their education in their future? Gender equality in education is certainly about access and achievements, but this is a limited view when trying to identify the potential capabilities education have and how it may affect gender equality (Chisholm 2005, GEEP 2008, Walker and Unterhalter 2007).

Recalling that South Africa has successfully achieved gender parity in education, but still faces severe gender inequalities in the school and in the society (see context chapter), Unterhalter (2005) suggests that education has to be understood much more broadly than schooling and that the processes of developing political and cultural understandings between “different socially situated gendered groups” must be included in education (Unterhalter 2005: 77). This is a much more challenging task than ensuring gender parity, because it may require a re-thinking of gender equality in education, adjusted pedagogical strategies and evaluation methods.

These issues will be brought up later in this chapter but first I will introduce findings on how gender equality is approached in policy and practices; first by looking at how the national



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policy framework approaches gender and then by exploring the schools approaches and efforts on this matter.

## 6.2 The educational policy framework on gender

Deciding to look at the policy documents in South Africa in order to reveal the gender focus/discourse in South African education was based on the perception that these documents represent the political basis that the school is to build its practice on and that these documents provide the school with a certain space to maneuver and a mandate related to the nation's vision of progress and development. Deciding to use policy documents in this study involved a thorough search among a vast amount of documents available from the South African Department of Education (DoE). They cover all aspects of education and policy making, organizing of education and pedagogical planning that is initiated from the government. I chose to look more specifically into documents that I expected would include the topic of gender equality/equity either as a general value or a specific pedagogical target<sup>21</sup>. The National Curriculum which describes the overall targets for education in South Africa and the comprehensive policy strategy on education and human capital for the Western Cape region were found representative as they expressed a political and value-based view on education. Among all the subjects offered in the South African school, the Life Orientation subject specifically intends to cover issues related to personal, social and emotional development and was therefore found relevant for this study.

### 6.2.1 The National Curriculum

In 1997 the NCS, also called Curriculum 2005, was implemented in South African schools, introducing a modernist development of education (Bredlid 2003). The ideals and principles of the new curriculum describe the core values of the constitution and its aims of nation-building (DoE 2007). The curriculum was further set against the discriminating and unjust system of education under apartheid where in particular racist and sexist elements were to be eradicated and replaced with principles that promoted anti-discrimination, human rights,

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<sup>21</sup> See appendix E for a more detailed list of documents.

democracy and inclusivity (Breidlid 2003, Chisholm 2003, DoE 2007). Thus, the curriculum is a strong and broad-based approach covering many aspects of human rights. Curriculum 2005 has been revised twice, first in 2002 and then in 2007 and is now replaced by the Revised National Curriculum Statements (RNCS) after a process of streamlining and strengthening the phrasing of statements and targets in the previous curriculum (DoE 2007).

In general, the South African NCS sets high targets for its education system as an important contributor to individual and societal change and development. Education is foreseen to create:

A prosperous, truly united, democratic and internationally competitive country with literate, creative and critical citizens leading productive, self-fulfilling lives in a country free of violence, discrimination and prejudice (DoE 2007: 4).

This quote suggests a high political vision and ambitious values for what the school is set out to achieve. I believe the concepts used are wide and thus open up for several interpretations and critical remarks. What does united really mean? Does it include the vast diversity in social, economic and cultural situations for South Africans, or does it mean equality in terms of “being the same”? What is required by people in order to live self-fulfilling lives? Can education alone reach this target? The curriculum statements do not touch upon these questions but leave a general impression that the RNCS aim to carry the responsibility for bringing the whole nation forward, emphasizing individual agency, knowledge and skills in the reach for unity and peace.

The search for a gender focus revealed that concepts related to gender were few and that gender equality to a large extent was found within the more general phrased statements in the curriculum. Thus, the different statements required interpretation in order to find a gender perspective, for example statements such as “freeing the potential of girls as well as boys” (DoE 2007: 7) may suggest a gender focus because both sexes are mentioned. Other statements like “social justice requires that those sections of the population previously disempowered by the lack of knowledge and skills should now be empowered” (DoE 2007: 12) may also suggest a gender aspect, knowing that girls and women have been and still are the most disadvantaged in the marginalized parts of South Africa (National Policy Framework on Gender, n.d.). But again, this suggestion is based on my own interpretation of

the statement's message since neither the target group nor the aim of empowerment is explicitly explained.

The term "non-sexism" is used once as one of the ten values that education is built upon and which suggests that gender discrimination in the society is recognized. "Equality" is used frequently in the document, but in a more general meaning and not specifically connected to gender equality. Finally, the concept of gender is mentioned once in the RNCS. It is included in the list among other issues that the education needs to show sensitivity towards: "In particular, the curriculum attempts to be sensitive to issues of poverty, inequality, race, gender, age, disability, and such challenges as HIV/AIDS" (DoE 2007: 10). Thus, gender is lumped in with all other forms of disadvantages and thus suggests no clear focus on gender.

These examples suggest that gender issues such as gender based discrimination and gender equality are included amongst other important social and political aims within the RNCS. However, recalling the complexities of gender norms and relations described in chapter five, together with the present vast gender challenges that South Africa faces (Pandor 2005) the brief mention of gender in the educational policy may be obscuring these challenges and not function as a tool and guidance for change (Chisholm 2003).

The strong rhetoric in the curriculum is also critiqued by Breidlid (2003) as he asks "can the rhetoric be transported to the real schools and make a difference as the government claims?" (Breidlid 2003: 84). This quote suggests that there might be a gap between the schools rhetoric and the realities that the schools and people exist in. One cause of this gap relates to the very different life situations that South Africans have determined by their abilities to be educated, employed and live safe and flourishing lives. Recalling the vast gap between rich and poor, still divided by ethnic lines as a consequence of apartheid (Thompson 2001), the African and the white population are equipped with very different capability sets in order to fulfill the intentions and the potential of schooling (Sen 2000). One single curriculum which to a large extent communicates a modernist worldview rather than the manifold cultural situation in South Africa (Breidlid 2003), may contribute to the gap between the advantaged and those who are disadvantaged in the society, thus creating very different premises for meeting the high targets for education. The divide between the schools ideology which emphasize the independent and self-fulfilling individual, and the home and community

which, in this research context, is strongly linked to traditional and socio-economic challenges is creating a challenge for the learners abilities to succeed in the school.

When the children come to school hungry, when there is nobody at home who can help them with their homework, when school and home have completely different cultural codes, when there are not expectations from the home environment as far as the child's performance is concerned, failure at school is a very likely possibility (Breidlid 2003: 100).

According to the capability approach the individual and their freedom, agency and well-being is the end and main target in development (Sen 2000). That people benefit from education relates to the opportunities people have to live the life they value and to achieve actual functionings that can enable them to improve their life situations and thereby becomes crucial in the nation's progress as well. Thus, people that live flourishing lives are evidence of a nation's progress. This aspect of development thinking is difficult to spot in the phrasing of values and ideals in the policy documents where an inclusion of the interconnections between the individual and the society is less emphasized. In order for people to positively achieve political liberties, good health and social powers depends not only on the individual but also on the institutional arrangements in society (Sen 2000). Thus, to what extent education is facilitated in society may determine people's ability to achieve well in life or to what extent it is possible to practice the values and visions of education in real life.

This I believe is highly evident when gender issues are specifically targeted. According to Pandor (2005) and Sivasubramaniam (2008) South Africa still faces challenges in achieving gender equity as a "gender redistributive" goal<sup>22</sup>. Most crucial is the girls and women's lack of control of reproductive rights and fear of violence both in public and private spheres (Gie 2009). Thus, one reason that is suggested for the limited success of reaching gender equity targets in education is the emphasis on a "broad anti-discriminatory and inclusivist approach focused on all discriminations" (Chisholm 2005: 8). The curriculum aims to include everyone and every aspect of the society with a vision of a more prosperous future and thereby intends to infuse through all learning areas in the curriculum rather than provide a specific focus on, for example, gender, race, disability and other forms of discrimination which are all lumped together as opposed to being focused on individually. If gender

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<sup>22</sup> Redistribution here is referred to as resources that are "distributed between men and in a way that addresses gender based asymmetries in investment and capacities of women and men" (Subrahmanian 2005 cited in Arnot and Fennel 2008: 73)

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inequality or other sensitive issues in the South African society are to be challenged, I argue it is necessary to label the processes that create unjust practices and what actions need to be taken in order to meet this challenge. Thus, the revised curriculum “could have but did not have the substantial effect on diffusing gender issues” (Chisholm 2003: 2).

I will now move from the national policy framework to the educational policy strategy for Western Cape. This document describes the policy targets and concerns for this particular region in which the research school is situated.

### **6.2.2 Policy strategy for education and human capital**

The Human Capital Development Strategy (HCDS) made by the WCED in 2007/2008 is a concrete example of a recent and comprehensive policy paper that describes how the policy of education in the Western Cape society is envisioned. The HCDS aims to provide a holistic and strategic plan for education in the Western Cape Province and covers all phases of education from primary to higher education, descriptions of past and present situations in schools, contextual analyses and policy targets and strategies. Given space constraints I will only be able to point out general aspects which I find relevant for this study, namely the gender focus in strategic educational policy.

Already in the document's foreword the reader is served some core ideas of how education may play a role in state development. Amartya Sen and the capability approach are presented as a key in how to understand development with the quote: “development can be seen...as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (WECD 2007: i). Knowing that freedom is one essential aspect of the capability approach which puts humans as the end of development thinking, I believe that the title of this document (Human Capital Development Strategy) may communicate a contrast to how the capability approach emphasizes the concept of development. The notion of human capital seems to be manifest in the HCDS strategy and reflects the assumption that what humans produce of knowledge, financial capital or goods is decisive for societal development (Pandor 2005). The HCDS describe as a point of departure that the “current pool of human capital is too low, and the existing human capital does not possess the requisite knowledge and skills that will enable the province to drive its socio-economic development” (WECD 2008: 3). Thus, it is possible to recognize an

emphasis on a neo-liberal approach to development as opposed to Sen's more critical justice approach. Based on this interpretation it is possible to ask whether the policy makers within education are choosing the most appropriate discourse in terms of meeting the ambitious aims in the NCS?

The focus on gender in the document seems vague and just to a limited extent included in this volume. Even though gender inequality is mentioned as one of the challenges to South Africa as a developmental state where "inequities inherited from our colonial and apartheid past have grown significantly since 1994, indicated by race, location and gender divides" (WCED 2008: 6), it is obvious that the HCDS does not provide any analyses or inclusion of gender as an influential factor for the problems that girls and women face in communities and schools, nor its connection to traditional beliefs and practices that may hamper the role of education as an agent of change (Pandor 2005). The focus lies on achieving equal numbers of boys and girls in education, as the quote below suggests, rather than analytically addressing the structural causes for gender inequality in society.

Investments in people, in human capital, is a key component to this (achieving the MDG goals) and should include, among other priorities, the following: scaling up of investment in education that is skills-intensive, and effectively deploy human resources in the provision of social services; (...) promoting gender parity in education systems not only at the primary level but also at secondary and tertiary levels, especially investing in boarding and transportation facilities for girls (WCED 2008: 34).

Gender based issues and conflicts in the community, such as domestic violence, rape, divided families, the unfair share of resources and power are not explicitly mentioned in the document. Neither are gender inequalities and conflicts explained as probable or relevant causes for the challenging socio-economic situation in many communities. What I believe is a positive feature though is that the HCDS do acknowledge the importance of including people's realities in educational strategies and thereby suggests that the school to a larger extent has to include the community in order to promote change in the community:

... schools are embedded within the communities and, as part of the life of the communities, reflect their dynamics. As a result, what happens in the community is seen at micro-levels within schools. Therefore if we wish to effect change in the community, we must initiate change at the school, and conversely, if we wish to effect change in the school, we must initiate change in the community. The two are inextricably linked (WCED 2008: 88).

How the context is to be included is not explicitly phrased but it does point to important educational principle that learning has to be contextually based in order to be relevant and effectual (Abagi 2005).

Both the RNCS and the HCDS documents have shown that gender is provided with a limited focus in the policies of education. The concept of gender is baked within general phrasings on equality and rights, however, not explicitly recognized as a crucial element in the building of “sustainable societies” (Chisholm 2005, UNFDP 2010). The documents communicate high ambitions on behalf of the teachers and the learners and what they can achieve out from education, but I find it difficult to see that these ambitions are rooted in the complex social realities the stakeholders carry.

In the next section I will introduce the research schools efforts on gender in particular through their pedagogical teaching and organization of their students. I will start with a brief description of two characteristics of the schools social environment.

### 6.3 The schools policy and practise on gender

Recalling that students come from a challenging background characterised by family traumas, poverty and a community where everyone is at risk of being exposed to robberies, crime and violence, the school is given a particular responsibility in order to create a good learning environment for the students. All the respondents claimed that the school managed to do so and that they were thankful for the opportunity to study and teach at this school. I will therefore briefly present some of the general principles for the schools social environment before I turn my attention to the specific issue of gender.

As already described in the methodology chapter (section 3.3.1) the research school was, according to the principal, the teachers and the students, a well-functioning school compared to many other township schools: “You know, here the learners are well behaved, but in other schools they don’t have any respect for their teachers. They don’t do their homework and they are carrying guns in the classrooms. There are battlefields in the schools” (interview: principal, 18/08/2009). The research school offered the students a neat and safe environment, the school was well-resourced in comparison with other schools in the area and in addition, the teachers showed pride in their students regarding their academic and social achievements.

A focus on discipline and code of conduct was valued as an important factor for the schools achievements:

A school has to develop a code of conduct for learners that are the rules, the way the children should behave. (...) We try to mould the rules of conduct into their behavior and teach them what is right and what is wrong. We need to read them this like a bible. (...) The code of conduct is the key (interview: principal, 18/08/2009).

Also the teachers supported this view and stated that the code of conduct was one of the core values of the school: “We are preparing them also by discipline. We want to see them as good people that behave properly also outside the school” (interview: female teacher A, 03/08/2009). In addition to discipline, the principal emphasized the importance of including all the students in the learning process:

We can't undermine the children. We need to treat them equally and find out what they need. The main focus as a teacher is to go to the class, and go to those who are struggling, to give them attention and listen if they have things they need to express. They might sit there with a lot of problems and then they are not responsive of learning anything! In the end of the day you can see what you achieved, that you have touched something. You feel amazed when you can see that these children are succeeding (interview: principal 18/08/2009).

This quote may illustrate some of the pedagogical philosophy that is underlying the schools work. The inclusiveness and care that the principal expresses for the students may be important guidance for the teachers as well and for the aim of providing the students with a good and safe learning environment. In the next section I will present data that describes the schools gender focus as well as what seem to be the limitations of the school's approach.

### **6.3.1 Equal access and equal treatment**

In order to investigate how the school related to the concept of gender equality and equity I used various methods. I addressed my research questions to the students, teachers and principal and conducted classroom observations as well as observations during breaks and assemblies. I was interested in how the stakeholders would describe the school's focus and concrete efforts in achieving gender equality and if they would describe a commonly agreed



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gender discourse or diverse perceptions. I was also interested in whether they had expectations towards the school in terms of challenging gender inequalities.

The school's formal policy document presents a broad academic and social ambition that includes: a) providing all students with high quality education, b) promoting independency and critical thinking among its students, c) establishing strong links between the school, home and the community and d) creating safe and secure environments for the students. The policy document does not mention nor address gender equality specifically. However, the respondents underlined during the interviews the importance of addressing gender, not only in relation to education, but also because gender inequalities and unjust practices are highly evident in their community. Some concrete efforts were initiated by the school relating to how the students were organized in academic and social activities.

Mixing boys and girls in classes and other activities were referred to as one important effort in achieving gender equality in the school, as well as being one of the most important changes in the school in comparison to how the students were organized in pre-1994 schools. While the students before were divided by gender either in separate classes or separate sections in the classroom, girls and boys are now gathered in academic as well as social activities.

Learners have to accept who they are and respect each other. Therefore we have mixed classes and mixed activities. The girls are also put on the same par as boys in the sport (interview: principal, 06/08/2009).

As a result of providing equal opportunities the school has now a girl's team in football and a boy's team in volleyball and also in after school activities the boys and girls share the same opportunities to participate in dancing and music classes (interview: principal, 18/08/2009). Some of the students underlined that gender equality in the school was mainly visible by the fact that they were treated the same by the teachers. Statements such as "here in the school the teachers treat us as equal, there is no difference" (interview: Nondyebo, 11/08/2009) illustrate this. Also the findings retrieved from observations during lessons and breaks gave me the impression that that boys and girls generally seemed equally engaged and participating in organized activities (observation notes, 2/8, 6/8/2009). Thus, it was difficult to spot evidence of the gender complexities that were described for me in chapter five.

Practical tasks such as cleaning the classrooms or playground area were before organized according to traditional gender customs, but were now changed.

In our culture the girls used to sweep the floors and the boys would do other things. It was our culture but now we try to change this and we don't have these rules. (...) Each and every individual should know what is right and what is wrong – so we take on this culture and make our students understand that we are the same, and that they should not treat our girls the way our fathers have done (interview: male teacher A, 12/08/2009).

The quote suggests that the abolishment of traditional practices was seen as an important achievement for gender equality. The quote also implies that the equal treatment of boys and girls are results of a new culture present in the school. Based on what the policy documents described, that the curriculum emphasizes values such as rights, equality and individuality, it may be possible to interpret the new school culture to be a reflection of these values. The next quote supports this notion and makes a clear division between the “old” practices and what is now understood as “new” and more “correct” practices.

Here, we try to acquaint the students. I don't say that the girls should clean up, but I say that the class should do that. You see now that the boys do the same things as girls today, they can wash and cook, it is not like before when they could not do anything like that. So I try to make the teacher to focus on equality because it is wrong to only ask the girls to do that (domestic work). We really try to change their mindsets (interview: principal, 18/08/2009).

The focus on numerical equality is evident in the school's policy of hiring new personnel. Even though the school does not have an outspoken gender policy they make an effort in achieving equal numbers of male and female teachers due to a balanced representation of men and women, “there is no policy, but we are trying to make a balance by employing an equal amount of male and female teachers” (interview: male teacher B, 11/08/2009). The present situation was that female teachers outnumbered male teachers and that in the next hiring process male teachers would be preferred.

Regarding our school, look at the male and female... When it comes to educators we have now more female teachers than men. So when we employ, we focus on the gender and will hire more men now because there are more female teachers (interview: male teacher A, 12/08/2009).

The schools efforts on gender equality were visible in both practical and rhetorical ways through mixed classes and activities, equal treatment and an awareness regarding work shared between the students. Together with the aim of providing a general inclusive social

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environment for the students, I got the impression that the school tried its best in order to meet both the high targets of South African education policy as well as the social and gendered challenges in the community. However, critical remarks from the students as well as the teachers were given on the schools efforts. This will be presented in section 6.3.3. In the following section I will introduce the Life Orientation subject which is relevant for this study as it covers topics related to relations, life choices and social challenges.

### **6.3.2 Life Orientation and the gendered focus**

Life Orientation answers to the political and ideological vision of the RNCS which emphasizes the need to equip the learners for meaningful and successful living in a society that finds itself in a rapidly, but challenging transformation process (Van Deventer 2009).

The Life Orientation Learning Area is central to the holistic development of learners. It is concerned with the social, personal, intellectual, emotional and physical growth of learners, and with the way in which these facets are interrelated. The focus is the development of self-in-society. The Learning Area's vision of individual growth is part of an effort to create a democratic society, a productive economy and an improved quality of life. (DoE 2002: 4).

The quote above suggests that individual growth is crucial for the creation of a democratic society as well as economic growth. The emphasis on the learner and the manifold skills and qualities (capabilities) he or she shall achieve in every aspect of life from academic knowledge to good health and social skills which presents a notion of an "ideal" human being for the South African society. The vision of individual progress expressed in the documents used in this study, the RNCS, the HCDS and the objectives for Life Orientation, communicate strong and important notions of how individual outcome in education is envisaged, phrased for example as: reach successful living, showing commitment to the united society or being able to make informed decisions regarding health and security (DoE 2007). It is within these general phrases that the more specific objectives related to knowledge and consciousness about gender issues is found. They will be listed below.

In the overall description of the Life Orientation subject (DoE 2002) the concept of gender is mentioned occasionally. Gender is, for example, mentioned as one among other challenges that South African students may face in their everyday lives: "Discrimination on the basis of race, origin and gender remains a challenge for learners in the post-apartheid era" (DoE

2002: 5). A specific focus on gender issues, and in relation to a specific pedagogical approach was described in the assessment standards for grade seven where the students are encouraged to: “Discuss effects of gender stereotyping, sexism and abuse on personal and social relationships” (DoE 2002: 31). Finally, in the Teachers Guide for the Development of Learning Programs Policy Guideline (DoE 2003a) the concept of gender is mentioned once as one of several factors that the teacher need to take into account when teaching the LO subject. The teacher is supposed to:

Encourage respect for diversity by reflecting all aspects of diversity in appropriate, sensitive and positive ways. This includes diversity regarding gender, level of ability, beliefs, etc. (DoE 2003a: 37).

The quote above suggests that the LO subject calls for an awareness on gender and other issues concerning marginalization. However, is this and the other general statements on gender enough in order to put gender equality as a concrete target in education? In chapter five I presented some aspects of the respondents’ experiences and perceptions on gender. They told stories that described family structures as male dominated, a community where social control and punishments are practiced, strict gendered expectations for boys and girls as well as few opportunities to behave or orient themselves outside these social structures. This description of gender norms and practices is part of the social background that the students come from, which they bring to the schools in the form of learned values, knowledge and skills. One can ask: To what extent do students feel able to transfer the schools knowledge into their everyday lives? One female student answered:

We learn about these things, inequality, you know. But I don’t think education is playing a role when it comes to changing this situation because it doesn’t make a difference for me! If we are going to learn things here in the school and then in the end of the day we are not going to use it, and not being able to share it with my family what I learn here in school, then I think it is useless (interview: Vumilo, 03/08/2009)!

This quote suggests that even though there are positive signs of gender equality in the school, the student experiences that she has limited opportunities to utilize her knowledge and skills in her home. This may even contribute to a sense of distrust towards the schools role as a provider of knowledge and an agent of change when it comes to gender equality.

What seems to be lacking in the schools approach on gender is a reflection on what kind of education that is needed in order to achieve gender equality, and what kind of skills and

capabilities the learners find useful in order to pursue gender equality in life (Vaughan 2007). I believe these two concerns are closely interrelated and that a concretization of capabilities related to gender equality and equity in education may be useful in order to make the normative ideas/assumptions of capabilities for gender equality into practical tools. Thus, a concretization of capabilities can provide a detailed description of what can be expected of education when it comes to promoting gender equality.

Walker (2007: 189) argues in her article “Selecting capabilities for gender equality”, that an ideal-theoretic list should specify how education may enhance gender equality<sup>23</sup>. I will use Walker’s list here as a reference when I highlight below what might be key capabilities for the aim of knowledge transfer from home to school.

*Autonomy* may be defined as being able to reason, to have choices and be able to live by the preferences each individual value (Walker 2007). Autonomy also contains empowerment in terms of reaching individual confidence and capacity and being able to negotiate and influence social relations (Rowland 1997 in Ekne 2010).

*Knowledge* of school subjects as well as additional information on health issues and individual rights provides the fundamental basis for life outside of school, in order to get job opportunities and careers, to be able to participate as a society member and to make reflected choices that may affect your own and others lives (Walker 2007). Regarding enhancing capabilities for gender equality, subject knowledge needs to contain comparative stories of gender relations and family situations which open up for critical reflections on gender perceptions and practices and consider both the individual and the societal aspect of gender (Murphy-Graham 2009).

The capability to be a friend and to participate in a group, thus functioning in *social relations* is crucial for the ability to solve problems and tasks and to reach common goods. Through social relations individuals may build capacities in order to respond to other human needs as well as being able to act inclusively and reach a sense of social belonging (Walker 2007). The focus needs also to be on gender relations in particular and with an awareness of how

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<sup>23</sup> Walker’s list is based on previous research on capabilities (Narayan and Petesch 2000) and other writers on the capability approach and capability lists (Alkire 2002, Nussbaum 2000, Robeyns 2003).

male and female learners relate to each other not only in school, but also in the home and within their peer group.

*Aspiration* is viewed as a “thick” capability which has the power to alter a person’s path. Having the motivation and hope to learn, succeed and to have a better life is perhaps one of the most important strengths in life and perhaps in particular for girl’s opportunity to redress adapted preferences that are molded by society and not necessarily are expressions of subjective preferences (Nussbaum 2000). Education is an important source for aspirations about what possibilities life may offer. High aspirations for their future life were also characteristic for the students I interviewed, which will be shown in the next chapter.

The final capability for gender equality that I emphasize here is *voice*. Appadurai (2004 in Walker 2007: 183) links the capacity of aspiration and voice together, arguing that they reinforce and nurture each other. Voice is important for the acquisition of knowledge, participation in learning, for the ability to speak out and to not be silenced through power relations. Having a voice in gender relations is in particular important, because the power divide is often defined here, often based on the expected gender roles that are legitimizing the dominant/subordinate relation between women and men. Voice may become a tool for being able to negotiate in such relations as well as being able to participate in social life on an equal basis with others.

I find that these capabilities touch upon both the instrumental and intrinsic values of education. According to Sen (2000) the instrumental value of knowledge and skills may facilitate the development of academic and practical qualifications that may lead to employment and active participation in society. Thus, such qualifications are crucial for the individual agency and a person’s ability to act according to their required responsibilities, beliefs and needs. The capability of voice is in particular an important instrumental skill as it is crucial for the individual to participate in social settings where cooperation and social interaction takes place; either we talk about school or home settings.

Autonomy and aspirations might be seen as outcomes of the instrumental efforts in school. Through subject knowledge, practical skills and social competence the learner develops abilities to reason and to take part in problem solving. Thus, knowledge may “give content” to the autonomous voice. Gaining good scores on subject knowledge, achieving successful

products in cooperation with co-students and establishing safe and inspiring relations may give motivation for reaching higher targets for yourself. The self-esteem that may come out from these achievements and from positive social relations with teachers and co-students are valuable and important in the transference of aspirations from the school to the home. Thus students should have the opportunity to practice and show their capabilities – I believe such experiences are valuable assets in private life as well.

In the next section, I will look more into how the students and teachers viewed the schools efforts on gender equality and what may be critical issues for the transference of gender equality into home relations. I believe that it is possible to recognize some of the issues on capabilities introduced above in the informants' statements.

### **6.3.3 Critical opinions of the schools gender discourse**

The critique on how gender issues were dealt with in the school focused mainly on three short-comings. First that time and attention allocated for gender issues were limited in particular within the LO subject. Second, that the content of the LO subject was more concerned about the physical aspects of gender rather than issues such as gender inequalities in the society. Third, that the school did not involve parents nor problematize the traditional practices in the community. I will start with the LO subject.

The limited timeframe for the LO subject gave little space for addressing gender academically.

No, it (Life Orientation) is not very substantially covered. And when you think about that LO is about students' lives – we can't say that we are talking about their lives in two lessons a week and that's it. I think LO should have been introduced a long time ago. It is quit new and compulsory now, but it has never been treated as a main subject (interview: male teacher, 09/08/2009).

The teacher here point to an important issue, or limitation, of the LO subject when he states that the time constraints of the subject makes it difficult to cover all the important aspects of the subject, or the relevant aspects of the students lives. Recalling the students home situation when it comes to gender, for example, the specific gendered expectations and the experiences of risking social exclusion if a person did not act according to what is customary, it seems that the students experiences is a rather complex reality compared to

how the subject attempts to fulfill the curriculum targets (described in section 6.3.1). Another limitation of this subject is the fact that many LO teachers are inadequately trained in the subject, thus lacking the competence required in order to provide sufficient teaching (Van Deventer 2009). Thus, Life Orientation has the potential to cover many of the social and sensitive issues related to gender inequalities, as well as emphasize the above mentioned capabilities such as autonomy, knowledge and social skills in gender relations, but with the lack of time, competence and resources it seems that the subject is reduced to address these issues merely superficially.

R: I can't see not in one book that gender issues are addressed in particular. We need to have resources and pedagogical material to get full information about these things (gender issues).

Q: Why do you think gender is not covered more specifically in the textbooks?

R: Maybe it is ignored, not taken as an important issue. We don't have anything in our school that addresses this issue properly. But in some subjects like in LO there is some focus (on gender issues), at least we talk about it, but not as a serious issue (interview: female teacher A, 03/08/2009).

This quote implies that not only resources are lacking, but also a more profound attention and acknowledgement towards the issue of gender was missing in the school. The same LO teacher said later on in the interview: "we take it as any kind of issue, but not an important issue in itself" (interview: female teacher A, 03/08/2009). This view correlates with how the policy documents recognised gender, namely as one issue among other issues (Chisholm 2003). The lack of acknowledgement of gender as a complex social phenomenon that is "ingrained" in peoples social awareness (Lorber 2000) seems to require more profound attention.

That gender issues were treated superficially was also evident when speaking of the content of LO where biological and physiological issues regarding gender were emphasised, rather than treating it as an issue related to social expectations, defined gender roles and power relations. One male student described it like this:

Sometimes they do teach us about gender, but they don't get deeper into the topic. They just rush it, and they talk about the puberty stage, how girls and boys react when they reach the puberty stage and that is the only thing they teach us about it (interview: Nelson, 04/08/2009).

This quote suggests that within the academic work gender is dealt with more as a biological issue, rather than a socially constructed phenomenon. There may be various reasons for why this happens. One reason may be a general lack of time and attention as mentioned above, or



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maybe because the social aspect of gender relations seems less acute in an environment where the students face constant physical threats in the form of sexual violence, HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancies (Gie 2009). The students' needs for information on these issues are important to cover, and in particular because there are few sources of information or support on such issues in the home, as the next quote suggests.

I have noticed that in LO the students are very interested in the physical changes the other sex experiences. They are so curious! And again in our culture, it is amazing, we are shy and we don't talk about these things. It is clearly a need for communication about these things because the parents will just explain issues like, for example, that babies comes with the baboons (interview: female teacher A, 04/08/2009).

The school seems to fill an important need for information when it comes to education on puberty and sexual relations. Most parents are reluctant to talk about these issues and leave the students with important, yet unanswered questions regarding health, pregnancy, STIs and HIV/AIDS. The silence from parents was spoken of as a challenge for the students and I will come back to this issue in the next chapter where the gap between the school and home is concretized.

A third critique of the school's gender approach points to a situation where the school is silent about gender issues related to traditional practices and beliefs found in the respondents' home environment. Patriarchal family structures, male dominance in sexual relationships, gender based discrimination and gendered expectations amongst peers and family members seemed not to be directly challenged in the school. Thus, the local gender norms and practices were almost absent from the school's academic and social agenda. "We can talk about it, but it is nothing we discuss properly" (interview: Adele, 25/08/09) was a common description from most of the students. The next two quotes suggests that the school will actively redress students behavior that was showing signs of traditional gender attitudes in the form of, for example, male dominance:

I will change their attitude. I would say that everyone is equal. There is no such thing as a male role and female role. We all should do everything! There is no such thing as the girls need to do the dishes and the boys not. I will promote that things are equal now. I will contest this traditional culture (interview: female teacher B, 18/08/09)

The role of the school is to make correct what was done wrong in the community. Even try to correct those who still do wrong. That is the vision of the school (interview: female teacher A, 03/08/2009).

I find these quotes interesting because they exemplify an attitude where the modern and the traditional gender discourses are set up against each other with apparently little room for nuances in how to understand or handle the traditional perceptions and practices that the students bring to the school.

Based on the various critiques of the schools efforts on gender equality, from not being treated as an “issue in itself”, to mainly a biological and physiological focus and lastly where complex gender realities in the students’ lives are not included in the pedagogy, I argue that the pedagogical efforts on gender equality is limited considering the strong cultural and traditional practices described in chapter five. I believe Odora-Hoppers points to an important clue that needs to be considered when education is targeting gender:

Speaking gender means trying to understand how society made you, what you have become, how it shaped your behavior, your aspirations, and your attitude towards yourself as well as towards society at large (Odora-Hoppers 2005: 55).

Changing attitudes or challenging established perceptions does not happen easily, but needs to be worked at through an ongoing process. In order for the school to be able to challenge social injustices in society, to transfer its values to the community I believe it has to go both deeper and broader in its approach and recognize such issues as fundamental for the ability of people to live the life they value. In the next section I will briefly introduce two examples of educational programs that aim to do exactly that.

## 6.4 Operationalize capabilities for gender equality

Recalling that capabilities for gender equality have been identified in this study to be *autonomy, knowledge, social relation skills, aspiration* and *voice*, the two studies presented below suggest concrete pedagogical efforts that can enhance such capabilities.

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The first one is Murphy-Grahams study of a secondary educational program, Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial<sup>24</sup> (SAT) in Honduras that targets female adolescents for the purpose of “undoing gender” (Stromquist and Fischman 2009: 270) by encouraging students and adult participants to rethink gender relations in their everyday lives. The target is set to help the students to develop capabilities that may enable them to take charge of their own lives as well as contribute to the building of better communities. The program contains four key components: textbooks, tutors, study groups and the community. All the components have gender equality as a mainstream target. I will briefly introduce these components here in order to describe the pedagogical structure of the program.

The textbooks are written in a conversational form where the students are invited to actively question and investigate gender issues. A crucial pedagogical issue is that the theory is integrated with practice and both modern and traditional sources are used in the problematizing of gender norms and practices. Thus, it seems that the students’ everyday realities are recognized and relevant for the theoretical study. The tutor is trained to assist the students in their group work as well as guide them in their texts, formulate questions, encourage reflections on experience and connect themes studied to the students’ everyday life experiences. The tutor’s role is to facilitate the study group in their reflections and discussion. The study group is usually composed of 15-25 students who meet regularly during the one month the SAT program lasts.

The community is an essential component of the SAT program and the students are motivated to interact and to share with family members, friends and neighbors what they have learned. Through the texts, tutoring and study group activities, the students reflect on the circumstances they come from and how to initiate activities of investigation within it (Murphy-Graham 2009).

Out from Murphy-Graham’s article (2009) I interpret the SAT program to offer a pedagogical course in how to rethink gender, how to address gender in the community, to build common experiences in a group that makes each and one stronger when meeting

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<sup>24</sup> SAT is a coeducational lower and upper secondary education program (grades 7-12) that operates in both rural and urban areas. It was designed in the early 1970s by a Colombian non-governmental organization, FUNDAEC. The program is now offered in several Central-Americans countries and some African countries (Kenya, Zambia and Uganda) (Murphy – Graham 2009).

families and the community with their knowledge and notions of gender insensitive practices. Thus, the findings of Murphy-Graham's study suggests that participants found themselves in a process of undoing gender "by recognizing gender relations in their everyday lives in a way that reflects their increased consciousness of gender equality" (Murphy-Graham 2009: 516). On some occasions the adult respondents were able to achieve some practical changes in their life situations because they had been encouraged and equipped with knowledge in order to, for example, negotiate with their partners the division of domestic work.

The SAT program may give some idea of how to operationalize capabilities through concrete pedagogical efforts. The participants are set in a situation where their opinions and life experiences are a starting point for reflections and discussions. Their autonomy as important individuals is valued and their ability to change gender inequalities in home and community is trusted. Throughout the program the students work within a study group where they have to listen and participate together, thus their social relation skills are practiced. In addition, their voice is heard and rehearsed and becomes a concrete tool when the family and community are to be addressed.

The second study may give us a different picture of how capabilities can be targeted in practice. Monisha Bajaj (2009) presents findings from a low-cost private school in Zambia which aims to foster greater gender equity amongst the students by destabilizing some established gender perceptions. First, the school's policy includes efforts that maintain gender parity at all levels of the school. Second, the school is divided into a girl's camp and a boy's camp. Third, there is a requirement that both boys and girls carry out all cleaning tasks in their respective camps, thus avoiding the divide between what is traditionally viewed as "women's work" or "men's work". Finally, a general focus on values such as peace, equity and social justice are emphasized through daily interactive lessons, posters and play. Through these values a contrasting messages or images is offered in a societal context where violations of gender-specific rights, related to rape, domestic violence or forced marriages is severe (Bajaj 2009).

The findings of Baja's research may suggest that the research school's experiment on disrupting practices that produces gender inequalities within families and in society may influence the students conceptualizing of gender in their future life. Bajaj underlines that

these conclusion are preliminary. However, she saw that in particular the boys expressed a changed attitude towards cleaning as a gender defined task, and showed confidence and awareness of the importance of being able to be independent and being able to take care of your own life and household (interview with male student in Bajaj 2009: 492). Recalling the students' description of female headed families in section 5.3, I believe it is possible to see a correlation between Baja's findings and mine, where changed gender practices may lead to a more conscious thinking about gender roles.

The research school in Zambia may have shown that enhancing capabilities for gender equality does not necessarily go through mental processes only but practical tasks as well. The experience of altering gender norms are perhaps as important as the creation of new perceptions and may become part of enhanced capabilities for gender equality. Having experienced the "others" work may contribute to an increased respect for the importance of such work thus may develop empathy for the unequal share of domestic work in the home. Through active participation new knowledge and skills are learned and become part of a person's competence.

Both of these studies have shown us that gender equality is possible to address with concrete efforts and with capabilities targeted. It requires that gender is taken as an issue in itself, a recognition of gender relations as complex and crucial in people's lives, and that resources and strategies for gender equality need to be prioritized in education.

## 6.5 Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to shed light on how gender is approached within the schools policy framework and through its practice. The findings have been discussed in light of the capability approach in order to critically view the potential of education as a promoter of gender equality and equity. The data has shown that gender issues in general, and gender equality in particular are not explicitly focused on in the policy documents chosen for this study, the RNCS, the HCDS and the pedagogical guidelines of the Life Orientation subject. The gender topic is not explicitly approached, but defined within a broader right-based approach (Chisholm and September 2005) and thereby becomes part of a modernist rhetoric on education, individuality, equality and rights within the curriculum (Breidlid 2003).

How gender is defined within the policy framework might be recognizable also within the schools gender approach. Offering the students an academic and social environment based on inclusiveness, equal treatment of boys and girls and equal access to school activities, the school does show awareness of the importance of individual rights and equality. However, the respondents were critical towards the school's pedagogical efforts on gender equality because of the limited time, resources and attention the topic is given in the LO subject, and because gender insensitive practices in the community were not debated nor challenged directly in the school. Thus, the school did address gender superficially, but did not go deeper into the complexity of the topic.

What became evident during the reading of policy documents, observation of classes and the interviews with LO teachers and the students was that a specific identification of what knowledge, skills and capabilities needed for gender equality is missing in the school. The capability approach opens up for a concretisation of such knowledge and skills, and on the basis of Walker's list (2007) of five capabilities for gender equality (autonomy, knowledge, social relations, aspiration and voice) it is suggested in this study to be an important part of preparing and enabling the students for life outside of school. However, these capability targets require a specific and dedicated implementation by the school in order to change established gender perceptions with the students and if perceptions of gender equality may be communicated and transferred to the family and community. Two studies, by Murphy-Graham (2009) and Bajaj (2009) have been introduced as examples of pedagogical efforts that targets capability building for gender equality in, and outside, schools. They suggest that for the school to be a promoter of gender equality, and being able to change people's mindsets, the topic must be targeted specifically both within the school's policy and pedagogical work.

This chapter, which has aimed to illuminate the schools gender approach, and the previous chapter that describes aspects of how the family and community perceive and practice gender norms suggest that there is a gap between a modernist rhetoric on individuality and rights in the school and a traditional rhetoric on patriarchal hierarchies and communality in the home. I believe this gap plays an important role in the schools potential and possibility to transfer its knowledge, skills and values to the community. In social construct theory the process of transferring secondary socialised knowledge to the primary context is viewed as a challenging one because there seem to be a weak consistency between the original and the

new internalised knowledge (Berger and Lückmann 1966). Thus, being able to superimpose new knowledge and mindsets onto an already existing reality is difficult.

I have chosen in the next chapter to probe a bit deeper into this issue because I find it crucial in order to understand the schools role as an agent of change in societies. I will therefore briefly highlight two possible aspects of this gap in order to concretise how the transference of school knowledge to the community might be challenged.

## 7. Minding the gap

As mentioned in the two previous chapters I have presented findings that suggest an illustration of how gender is perceived and practiced within family relations and within the education system in a South African township. Based on my interpretation and analyses of the research data I argue that it is possible to identify a gap between the schools gender rhetoric and practice and the contextual gender perceptions and practices, and that this gap may represent some obstacles in the schools efforts in promoting social change.

In this chapter I intend to highlight two specific aspects of this gap, which contradict and which were emphasized by the respondents of this study to be of relevance and importance for their everyday life. On the one side, the respondents expressed high aspirations for the schools potential to create individual progress and flourishing lives. On the other side, the respondents' socio-cultural reality was characterized by some traditional norms and practices that made the aspirations and potential of education difficult to transfer into the community. The specific socio-cultural constraints looked upon here are the silencing of the school's knowledge and gender sensitive issues. I underline that there are other and manifold restraints on people's ability to "live out" the potential of education such as unemployment and poverty (UNESCO 2010), also recognized by the participants in this study. However, I have chosen to emphasize the lack of opportunity to discuss important issues with family members who was brought up repeatedly by the students and the teachers during the interviews and described as a major obstacle for their ability to practice the knowledge and values gained through education.

Recalling that a capability is defined as a person's ability to do or to be what he or she values and that in order to put these valuable acts into reality, to practice and utilize individual agency, freedoms must be ensured (Sen 2000). Sen further underlines that freedoms of individuals are the basic building block in order for development to happen.

Greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves and also influence the world, and these matters are central to the process of development (Sen 2000: 18).

I interpret freedom in this quote to describe a detachment from any constraints, social, cultural, political and economic that might limit the individual to choose and live the life she



or he sees valuable. How freedom is conceptualized within the capability approach, I believe it is possible to recognize also in this study when trying to understand to what extent people are able to negotiate and live the life they value. Revealing a gap between the schools modern discourse and the traditional gender discourse found within the family and community context brought forward issues which I argue relate to the role of the school as a provider of capabilities and freedom. I will therefore briefly elaborate on the modern – traditional divide before I go further to the issues of aspirations versus silence of knowledge.

### 7.1 In between tradition and modernity

“Gender change has become iconic for late modernity” argue Arnot and Mac an Ghaill (2006: 2). This suggests that traditional patterns of gender reproduction are changing in the processes of urbanization, new work patterns and modern lifestyles. This seems to be evident in the township of Crossroads where the urban situation has changed the premises for traditional family structures found in the rural areas. Traditional gender divided work, family responsibilities and gender roles are contested as a consequence of being able to manage financially in an urban setting (UNFPA 2008). However, gender reproduction is not necessarily replaced in the urban family because traditional gender identities may “become the means of survival within a continuously shifting social order” (Arnot and Mac an Ghaill 2006: 3). I believe that this quote points to what may be recognizable in the research context of this study as well. Recalling how manhood is traditionally defined and valued positively and patriarchal family structures still are the norm in the township (see chapter five), may point to the keeping of traditional gender identities despite a change in social and economic contexts. Thus, gender change may be a characteristic of modernity, but may have limited effects on family structures and its gender division which still seems fundamentally ingrained in the traditional practices in home (Lorber 2000).

Breidlid (2003) suggests that modernity can be seen as a cultural code where concepts such as individuality, rationality and progress gather the meaning of the modernity project. I find that in particular individuality and independence were emphasized by the respondents as an important value in order to manage in a “modern” world (the quotes in the next section might illustrate this). Modernity seems to emphasize a perception of the individual “self” where the

freedom, choices, conducts and activities of an individual have their origin in the persons own wants and needs. Thus, “individuals come to see themselves as centers of their own life world” (Arnot and Mac an Ghaill 2006: 2). This might be viewed as a contrast to how many traditional cultures view the individual, namely as an integrated part of a community (Gyekye 1997).

According to Arnot and Mac an Ghaill (2006) individualism challenges the traditional collectivity thought because the centre of preferences changes from the traditional ideal of the community as a bearer of social relations, to the modern focus on the individual. This change implies that the fixed notions of gender identities and gender roles may be questioned and re-defined and that traditional and established gender structures and definitions of male and female roles within families and communities are contested. Based on how the students and teachers viewed traditional gender practices negatively in comparison with how they viewed the schools equality approach, I believe Arnot and Mac an Ghaill might be right. However, what this study also shows, and on the basis of social construct theory (Berger and Lückmann 1966, O'Brien 2006), is that the contesting is limited because the social and cultural backgrounds of the respondents seem to hold strong mechanisms in the form of social control that influences what is acknowledged and valued behavior and beliefs in the community (see section 5.3.1).

In the next two sections this modernity-traditional divide is visible and exemplified through the participants descriptions of aspirations of education which seem to be a contrast to a traditional social practice of communication.

### **7.1.1 The power of aspirations**

Being able to aspire and foresee a better life for yourself is a crucial resource for poor and disadvantaged people in order to contest and alter their own life conditions and welfare (Walker 2007). One part of the ability to aspire is hope, which is defined as a “sense of possibility that life can offer” (Hage 2001 quoted in Walker 2007: 183). Thus, education may potentially foster the capability of aspirations and hope because knowledge can expand a person’s “horizon”, open up for new thinking and insight and eventually bring forward a person’s talents and passions. This notion of education was underlined by the respondents as they express high aspirations for the role of education in people’s lives:

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Every person has a key inside and there is always a door to be open. This is what the school does. Find the key and give the students a chance to open a door in life (interview: principal 17/08/2009).

Education gives me confidence! Because when you are equipped with knowledge you find that you are accessible to opportunities and you can get to things that make you strong (interview: Adele, 25/08/2009).

For me I think education is the only way that someone like me can achieve and fulfill her dreams. Education is like the coolest thing because it makes us understand the world around us (diary: Lindile, 04/08/2009).

These quotes suggest perceptions of the school as an important provider of capabilities such as knowledge, reason and autonomy. Most important, the quotes link to what Sen argues in his book *Development as Freedom* (2000) that education is a basic capability that may enhance other capabilities. The principal's quote underlines the intrinsic value of education when she imagines education as a key to closed doors: use the key, open the doors and other potentials and opportunities in life may be revealed. The instrumental and positional values of education may also be recognized in the respondent's statements. For example, being "equipped with knowledge" strongly implies that the schools subjects provide you with tools that are pragmatically useful and necessary in life, thus, describing the instrumental aspect of education (Unterhalter and Brighouse 2007, Walker 2007).

Related to the strong convictions on the schools potential as a capacity builder, the students' future perceptions were optimistic. Many of the students portrayed their future to be successful and flourishing, thus, showing almost a firm conviction that they will be able to change their present life situation into better conditions characterized by being well-educated, holding a well-paid job, living independent and responsible lives.

I got this beautiful picture you know. I would live in a good house, be happy, like feeling comfortable. Having what you want! But not unnecessary things! But I would like to see myself in a good condition, be dependent on myself and not be dependent of someone else (interview: Vumilo, 03/08/09).

A good future for me is to study first and be a good accountant and then get a big home where I can take care of my children and myself. That I can do what I have to do, what is important and what is positive in life. That is a good life for me (interview: Martha, 03/08/2009).

I find that these quotes support the notion that education may have the potential of expanding agency, freedom and opportunities (Walker and Unterhalter 2007). The students show us that they are aware of these potentials of education, and that they reach for them. But on what

ground can these aspirations grow? Are they transferable to the students' home situation? In the next and last section I will bring up again the social interactions of the respondents family and community context described in chapter five. Recalling the stories of family relations and a social environment featured by strong traditional ties when it comes to gendered norms, expectations and social control the next section will bring up another feature of this social context, the silencing of gender issues and school knowledge.

### **7.1.2 The silencing of knowledge**

The school is discussing gender issues but in the community this is a very rare topic, a very sensitive issue. You won't even hear by a mistake people talking about it, but in the school it is talked openly about so that everyone can understand (interview: Martha, 03/08/2009).

There is a conflict because mostly at school they inform us about life, for example, there are topics such as sex, intercourse and HIV/AIDS. But when you go to our community our parents don't want to talk about those topics, they say that we are not old enough to know about these things (interview: Angie, 04/08/2009).

The quotes above suggest that the communication between the students and their parents is constrained and that this lack of communication was experienced as a conflict. Being able to share knowledge and to get feedback and support on the choices you make in life was said by the students to be of major importance in order to be able to make the right decisions in life. Being a youth in the township of Crossroads means that they are exposed to an unsafe and dangerous environment in terms of the high level of crime and violence, gender based discrimination and abuse (Gie 2009). The students in this study were well aware of the high risk of getting hurt, pregnant, imprisoned and even killed if getting involved in crime-related or sexual activities, but the lack of support from and communication with their parents seems to make the situation more difficult for the students.

Sometimes it hurts when you got a problem and there is no one to talk to, and there is no one to share your problems with. I prefer to talk about it so that I can get an option of what I can do (interview: Vumilo, 03/08/09).

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According to O'Brien (2006) humans are products of the social interaction they participate in and the level of agreement and cooperation this social interaction allows. In this case, where the communication between generations is restricted it creates difficulties for the students as well as the teachers to transfer their knowledge about problems in life. I believe that the individual rights and freedom may also suffer from this situation as the opportunity to negotiate individual needs and wants become restricted. The next quote made by one of the male teachers suggests that also between the sexes there exist a strict divide in terms of what knowledge and information to share.

The problem of our tradition, the way we grow up as a child is how we are supposed to be as an adult, with this mindset of what is expected of you that there is a special treatment for girls and for boys. You don't know the secrets of men and women. You grow up behind a curtain. The parents have to open the window and start to talk and understand how we behave and that being educated is making us more open against each other. We know things and we want to change things (interview: male teacher A, 12/08/09).

The teacher points to a situation where both mindsets and treatments for girls and boys in society differ from the school practice and I find the phrasing "growing up behind a curtain" descriptive of what might be identified as the silencing of issues on social relations. That youth and adults, male and female experience fences in communication was said to be part of traditional practices. One female student claimed "they are sticking to their traditions and therefore they are not talking to us, telling us what is good or bad or what to do or not do" (interview: Nondyebo, 18/08/2009).

One reason for this silencing of sensitive issues was said to be the parent's need of "holding on to dignity" (interview: Nelson, 04/08/2009). Dignity was defined as having respect, and in the sense of others being afraid of you. In the Xhosa culture respect for the elders is a strong characteristic and based on what the students described for me, it includes a certain hierarchical distance between the generations. Discussing sensitive issues and thereby getting involved in the mindsets and interactions with the youth might be understood as a type of trespassing of the dominant position that would make the elders feel less dignified. Another reason for the lack of involvement from the parents was said to be illiteracy among the parents and in particular lack of information about the students' social life outside the family.

First of all, the parents lack knowledge! They don't know what is going on. In the old days, they wanted to hold their dignity and not discuss difficult things. They think that we should not know about these things and that we need to be pure. But we do know! We do experience these difficulties. Today,

we live in a democratic country and old days are over. We must look forward. Parents must get out of the cultural things and focus on the future, so that they can deal with these kinds of problems (interview: Nelson, 04/08/2009)

I believe this statement describes what seems to be a conflict between the school and home, and that the students stand in the midst of it. Nelson points to the gap between the old days and the new time featured by new knowledge and democracy and that this creates a gap between the young and the adults in how to relate to the current issues in youths` lives.

The stories the students and the principal shared on communicating sensitive issues touched upon some important aspects of the role of education and how it may deal with a situation where the school and the home represent diverse and conflicting stands in how to educate and prepare the students socially. In the policy documents the education system envisages a development of the individual as a confident, independent and self-in-society learner which is “able to act in the interest of a society based on respect for democracy, equality, human dignity, life and social justice” (DoE 2003b: 4). However, the situation where having knowledge and being educated into these values does not necessarily guarantee an ability to transfer these values and knowledge in real life. The data has shown that the students meet resistance in form of silence because their knowledge and need for dialogue breaks with the established norms and practices connected to the role and positions of the family members. In addition, what the school and the students regard as valuable knowledge seems not to be the same as what is regarded as valuable knowledge with the parents and may therefore hamper the opportunities to transfer what is learned in school.

Recalling the SAT program in Honduras and its inclusion of theoretical and practical, modern and traditional sources in its pedagogy in order to increase capabilities towards gender equality, I believe the situation described above may call for an attention towards an integration of the social context and the social relations of which people are engaged in. Such issues should be regarded as important aspects of the constraining or the enlarging of individual capabilities (Sen 2000).

Capability and functionings depend on individual circumstances, the relation a person has with others, and social conditions and contexts within which potential options (or freedoms) can be achieved (Walker and Unterhalter 2007: 9).

This quote suggests that the human ability to live lives according to the potential of the individual is dependent on a person's capability set which is influenced by various cultural, social and economic circumstances (Sen 2000). Thus, having gained knowledge about social life issues such as sexuality and gender equality does not necessarily enable a person to communicate or practice these issues at home. This depends on whether the circumstances the individual live in provide him or her with the opportunities to do so, culturally and socially. I argue that in a context where sensitive issues are silenced and thereby constraining the communication between the students and the parents, it may also affect the students' ability to take use of the educational knowledge, skills and values they have acquired, thus, finding it difficult to utilize their capabilities to live the life they value.

## 7.2 Summary

This chapter has attempted to "mind the gap" by identify how the school and home environment may express quite different perceptions of the individual. The school contributes to an awareness of individual rights, equality and high aspirations that seem to marks a contrast to how the students are socialized by their families and in the community. Here they are raised within a defined hierarchy of more inflexible positions where there are few opportunities to questioning or communicate sensitive and personal issues. The difficulties in combining these perceptions are challenging for the students and it may represent a stumbling block for the schools ability to promote change.

In the next and final chapter, I will briefly sum up the main findings of this study and view these in relation to the research questions that have guided this study.

## **8. Bringing it to a close**

This thesis has attempted to explore and discuss the role of education as a promoter of gender equality in a South African context. In recognition of education as a key for development and progress and gender equality as crucial for sustainable societies, this thesis has sought to illuminate how these factors are interrelated and where stumbling blocks may be found. The task has been twofold: one, describe the home context related to gender norms and practices, as well as the schools approach and practices, and two, compare these findings and thereby discuss the role of education as an agent of gender change.

### **8.1 Summary of the main findings**

Gender equality in South Africa is one political target amongst others in the creation of a just and democratic country after the abolishment of apartheid. In the process of restructuring the state and the education system, both in form and content, it was expected that gender equality would be ensured by the new governmental structures. And in some ways gender equality has improved successfully. In particular with the achievement of gender parity in schools, South Africa has reached an important target in the EFA campaign (UNDP 2010). However, behind these numbers of parity, South African communities still face grave social challenges connected to gender discrimination, violence and injustice, expressed in, for example, the statistics on rape, sexual harassment and lack of opportunity to negotiate and participate in decision-making processes in home and communities (Gie 2009, National Gender Policy Framework, n.d.). The continuing situation of gender inequalities and gender-based discrimination may be connected to the fact that gender norms, roles and practices, the division between women and men, are deeply ingrained in people's lives and identity constructions and thus require efforts that go beyond gender parity goals and aim to address and challenge both established mind sets and structural injustices between men and women. In order to do so it is important to recognize the cultural, historical, traditional and religious frameworks that contributes to the social construction of gender in societies. Thus, the intersection of gender, social practices, institutional arrangements and cultural ideologies are intertwined and therefore important to include in gender policies as well as in gender research.



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The first research question: *How is gender perceived and practiced in the home?* has aimed to give a contextual description of some aspects of the gender construction in an African (Xhosa) township in Cape Town. Students, teachers and parents have elaborated on the issue of gender, described their family situations and their own experiences of social expectations related to gender. Based on this data it is possible to suggest some general social patterns.

The notions of family seem to be mainly connected to a traditional definition where male dominance and patriarchy is evident and where gender roles are tied to social rules and expectations. Social control mechanisms in form of exclusion and denigration occur and contribute to a keeping of a social order where the gender division is strict. The male role in the community is emphasised through, for example, labels such as breadwinner and head of the house, through the male initiation ceremony which is much valued by both male and female informants in this study as well as through the privileges men have in form of power and status in social relations. Such privileges might be an important cause for the keeping of the traditional gender division in the township. In addition, men seem to be facing de-masculinisation caused by a situation of high unemployment rates, poverty and social insecurity. Thus, traditional manhood, covered with power and status may become an important asset in the providing of male integrity and thereby male dominance.

The respondents have also told stories that describe a contesting of traditional gender norms and practices. The high rates of broken families have caused family situations where women take on what traditionally is regarded as men's responsibilities such as providing an income for the family. The students thus come from different home situations, experiencing different gender practices in their home, from traditionally organised families to single parent families where responsibilities and tasks are shared equally. How this will affect the students future gender relations are yet to be seen, but on the basis of the adult informants in this study, changing gender relations in the home and community context are difficult, often with the risk of jeopardizing personal integrity and family relations.

According to Stromquist and Fischman (2009) social change that involves a change in gender norms and practices does not happen "naturally", but through social modifications and by changing the collective consciousness of how people define man- and womanhood. Thus, challenging the social (the gendered) stock of knowledge requires that established gender patterns are addressed specifically.

Education is recognised to play an important role in social and political transformation processes on a global level, as well as in the new South Africa (DoE 2007). With the second research question: *How is gender perceived and practiced in the school?* I aimed to explore how gender is approached in the schools policy and practices. By probing into some of the educational policy documents such as the NCS, HCDS and Life Orientation guidelines I found that the educational policy documents seem to be loaded with values and ambitious aims for what the learners are expected to achieve in education and as contributors to the “pool of human capital” and financial progress in South Africa (WCED 2008). However, the search for a gender focus, and the recognition of gender equality as crucial for successful development, revealed that gender equality is not explicitly targeted in the educational policy but that the approach on rights and justice is rather generally expressed.

The interviews and observations conducted at the research school suggested that the school’s gender approach was somehow similar to the policy approach. In general, the school emphasised inclusiveness, quality education and safe learning environment for their learners as important educational aims. With the practicing of equal access to social and academic activities as well as equal treatment of boys and girls, the school contributes to an increased consciousness on individuality, rights and gender equality. Gender equality seems therefore to be integrated within a general framework on inclusiveness, but not specifically approached as an important issue in itself. According to the students and the teachers, the limitations of time, pedagogical resources and focus (for example by treating gender more as a physiological rather than a socially constructed phenomenon) in the Life Orientation subject may suggest that gender issues are addressed only to some extent.

I argue that this brief mentioning of gender in the schools policy and practice marks a contrast to the participants’ descriptions of gender norms and relations in their home context. Here, gender is described to be a fundamental and decisive factor when it comes to identity construction and in social relations. Thus, research question three: *How are these gender discourses experienced by the respondents?* and research question four: *How do these gender discourses affect the students perceptions of the future?* aimed to tease out the respondents’ opinions and notions of being in the midst of gender discourses.

This thesis has argued that a gap between the home gender discourse and the school gender discourse is evident, and that they respectively represent a traditional and modernist gender

view. The respondents have identified the gap to be a problematic issue because they find it difficult to transfer the school's knowledge, skills and values into their private life, with the consequence that they feel less able to negotiate or practice the life they see right for themselves. Thus, silencing of knowledge and lack of communication between generations and sexes may hamper social development processes including gender equality and equity. This divide, in tradition and modernity, in theory and practice, is recognised in this study to be of importance in the discussion of whether the school is managing the role as an agent of change when it comes to gender equality and equity.

How these conflicting norms and expectations are perceived and played out by the respondents have been discussed in light of the social construct theory which offer a useful tool for understanding how social interaction, the complexity of power relations, social control and the need for acceptance and recognition, may influence on the individual. Thus, established social structures are crucial for people's sense of belonging, or, it may also hamper development processes that can increase social justices and people's well-being.

The capability approach has been used in this study as a conceptual framework that illuminates the role of education in development thinking. Key concepts such as capabilities, agency and freedom emphasise the need for keeping the individual in centre of development processes as such factors may determent the individual potential to live the life they value. The instrumental, positional and intrinsic values of education point to various perspectives in which education can contribute to personal as well as societal progress.

### **8.1.1 Does education make a difference?**

The path whereby education may lead to progress and improved life standards is in real life not as clear as policy rhetoric may give an impression of. That education is crucial in development processes is hardly disputable, however, having access to education does not necessarily enable people, and societies, to challenge or improve life situations. The working title for this study have therefore attempted to address this concern and to bring up what may be stumbling blocks for education as a promoter for gender equality and equity.

Two aspects are in particular highlighted. One, the gap between the home and the school's gender discourse represent a traditional and a modernist worldview in which the respondents

find themselves in a situation where combining these worldviews are difficult. The transference of the school's knowledge, skills and values, into the home and community context are challenging because notions of individuality and gender equality are rejected as appropriate issues for children and parents to talk about, thus, silenced.

Two, for education to make a difference on social justice it has to challenge established structures that contribute to inequalities and unjust practices with more concrete and ambitious efforts. What a gender-sensitive approach in education requires is an identification of which knowledge and skills, thus capabilities, may enhance people's consciousness on gender equality and thereby enable them to challenge traditionally beliefs and practices in the home context. This thesis has identified *autonomy, social relation skills, knowledge, aspirations* and *voice* to be crucial capabilities for gender equality as they may increase individual empowerment and consciousness of gender inequalities. I believe that with the examples of the pedagogical programs in Honduras and Zambia (presented in section 6.4), pedagogical approaches and means are shown to be crucial in the building of capabilities for gender equality and that it is possible to transfer such capabilities into the community context. Thus, stumbling blocks are possible to overcome.

Nelson Mandela once stated that education is the most powerful instrument which we can use to change the world. I believe he is right but that it requires an education that dares to challenge social injustices, such as gender inequalities, "at its roots".

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## Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guide for the students

Appendix B: Interview guide for the principal

Appendix C: Observation Form

Appendix D: Consent Form

Appendix E: List of documents

## **Appendix A: Interview guide for the students**

### **1. Introduction:**

- Present myself and aim of study
- Consent form
- Fact sheet

### **2. Describing family structures and community:**

- How would you describe the local community of Crossroads in terms of gender inequality, equality? (Considering these concepts: Decision making and Power relations)
- How will you describe your family when it comes to gender roles, responsibilities and work share
- Is it possible to describe an ideal family? (Perceptions about human relations)
- Why do you think that men and women behave differently? What or who is creating the rules/or decides how things should be?

### **3. Perceptions and opinions about the role of education in relation to gender equality:**

#### **School practices:**

- Can you describe some concrete actions or activities the school makes in order to address gender inequality? (Topics, arrangements, behaviour focus etc)
- How would you characterize the schools effort or initiatives in terms of addressing gender inequality and gender issues?
- Do you think that there is a difference in how gender issues are expressed and acted upon (good or bad) in the school and your local community?
- Do you think that the text books used in school reflect your life here in Crossroads in a good way?

#### **Schools opportunity for making change:**

- How would you consider the schools possibilities to actual create a change in how male and female relates to each other?
- What can be done, or done differently?

#### **Schools responsibility:**

- Would you consider the school to have a special responsibility in order to try to achieve social change/development in society?

- Is there anything the school can do differently or initiate to do in order to address gender inequality?

#### **4. In-depth interview of experiences related to the concepts/issues**

- How will you define the concept of gender equality?
- How will you describe gender relations in your family/community?
- What do you think is the main cause for gender inequality in your society?
- Do you think that the situation of gender inequality in the society will affect your choices or possibilities for living the life you want in the future?

#### **5. Perceptions of well being and quality in life:**

- How would you describe a good life for yourself, now or in the future?
- What kind of resources do you think is needed in order for you to achieve what you want in life?
- What do you expect from people around you in order to achieve this life?
- What kind of obstacles do you see might make your plan difficult to achieve?
- Does the school play a role (academic or socially) in your perceptions of the future? How?

#### **NB! FOCUS points during interviews:**

**Interviewing the students:** Focus on their experiences, their perceptions of the issue and their perceptions of life quality and future plans.

**Interviewing the teachers:** Focus on the schools role and practices, the affect on the students and their own experiences/perceptions of good life.

**Interviewing the parents:** Focus on context and descriptions, expectations of children and gender roles, perceptions of good life and future plans for children, and the schools role in making a difference.

## Appendix B: Interview guide for the principal

- Professional background
- The history of the school
- Facts about the school: amount of students, teachers. Has the school been growing or the same size the whole time?
- Organisation of school, PTA etc.
- How the school relates to its environment: Poverty. Crime
- How do you deal with /relate to the challenges in the community?
- How does this environment affect the student's achievements academically?
- What kind of social challenges do students face in the school?
- How does the school relate to the traditional culture in Crossroads? Is the culture a part of the schools practice and content? What? How?
- How does the school relate to gender issues?
- What is the most influential aspect on the schools gender policy?
- Does the school relate to or deal with the traditional gender roles? Are they discussed etc.?
- Can you explain/describe what role religion plays in the schools policy/practice?
- How would you describe the parent's participation in the schools work? Positive/Negative? Active/passive?
- What kind of future prospects do you see for your students? What is your experience? What are their options after school? Is there a difference between boys and girls?
- What is the most important contribution the school makes in its community?
- What does the school need in order to achieve its vision?
- Are there things that the school cannot do, but would like to do, because the parents would not allow it, accept it? (Like addressing sensitive issues, demand more responsibility etc.)



## Appendix C: Observation form

Observation of:

- 1) student activities and communication in school context,
- 2) School practices and awareness of gender issues, gender sensitivity

<b>Date and Time:</b>	<b>Class/Subject:</b>	<b>Teacher:</b>
<b>Key aspects:</b>	<b>Observation:</b>	<b>Comments / What does not happen?</b>
<b>Description of physical environment:</b> Equipment, standard, sufficient learning aids, furniture etc.		
<b>Activities:</b> Learning activities, pedagogical methods. Social activities Individual/group work (gender sensitive?)		
<b>Description of social environment:</b> Communication between teacher – students, boys – girls. Communication between boys-girls. Confident learning environment		
<b>Behaviour:</b> Actions – Reactions (responses) Girls behaviour Boys behaviour Teachers behaviour		

## Appendix D: Consent form

### Consent form

I hereby give my consent to participate in interview with Heidi L. Augestad regarding her case study on education and gender in Cape Town, July-August 2009.

I have been reassured that all responses will be held in strictest confidence and that no names or other individual identifiers will be attached to any direct quotations which are reproduced in written or verbal reports.

The interview session will be tape-recorded for the sole purpose of helping to ensure accuracy. The only individuals to have access to these data will be the researcher (HLA) and the translator (if needed). The recorded interview and the transcriptions of these will be securely saved in digital files on HLA's personal computer. All data will be deleted after analyses are completed.

I also understand that I am free at any time to terminate my participation in this interview session.

Time and place

Signature

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## Appendix E: List of documents

Life Orientation: Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards, Grade 7-9.

(Published by Department of Education.)

Monitoring and Evaluation Report on the Impact and Outcomes of the Education System on South Africa's Population: evidence from household surveys.

(Published by Department of Education)

Reflections on the Human Capital Development Strategy: first and second series.

(Published in 2007 and 2008 by the Western Cape Education Department)

Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools).

(Published by the Department of Education. Website: <http://education.pwv.gov.za>)

Revised National State Curriculum. Life Orientation.

(Published by Department of Education. Website:

<http://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/GET/doc/life.pdf>)

Senior Phase Life Orientation, Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standard (Grades 7-9).

(Published by the Department of Education.)

The national Curriculum Statement & Assessment Policy (Grades 4-6).

(Published by the Western Cape Education Department. Website:

<http://curriculum.pgwc.gov.za>)

Violent nature of crime in South Africa: A concept paper for the justice, crime prevention and security cluster.

(Published by Department of Safety and Security. Website:

[http://www.info.gov.za/issues/crime/violent\\_crime.pdf](http://www.info.gov.za/issues/crime/violent_crime.pdf))