

**RESEARCH TITLE**

# Discourses of learning, transition and agency amongst students who attended a Cape Town high school under Apartheid

**Name:** Dr Jasmine Matope  
**Supervisors:** Professor Aslam Fataar  
 Professor Azeem Badroodien  
**Institution:** Stellenbosch University, South Africa  
**Year of Award:** 2016  
**Qualification:** PhD

**ABSTRACT**

*This dissertation explores how a group of students who attended a Cape Town high school between 1968 and 1990 navigated their schooling space and acquired various skills, knowledge and understandings to engage with the social world during and after leaving school. The learning experiences nurtured the students' critical thinking, agency, assertiveness, self-worth, self-esteem, respect, autonomy, and desire to exercise social justice, dignity, responsibility and citizenry.*

*I employ the works of Pierre Bourdieu to show how the students were not simply defined by their structures and contexts, but that they invariably acted back on the worlds they inhabited by employing a variety of understandings and meanings to navigate their schooling and other pathways into adulthood (Bourdieu, 1984). I also engage with the work of Paulo Freire to examine how the schools opened the eyes and minds of students to become more fully human by reflecting and acting upon the world in ways that transform it (Freire, 1978: 26). I also use Nancy Fraser's theory of social justice to analyse how the school enables the students to overcome the social and racial barriers that inhibit them from participating on par with others and as full partners in their schooling and social interactions (Fraser, 2007).*

*Methodologically, the study is based on the qualitative paradigm. I did extensive interviews with 14 students. I utilised the life history and life course techniques to locate the students as individuals in time and space, and to interpret their memories and perceptions in ways that bring fresh perspectives on how they internalise learning over their lifetimes. I also interviewed four teachers to get a broader understanding of how the school's ethos and pedagogical practices involve the students and promote their rationality and particular skills and world views. In particular the students observe that they are encouraged to participate and take responsibility positions in various activities such as debates, drama, films and sports that make them feel part of the learning process and make learning more meaningful, useful and transferrable.*

*The dissertation thus argues that when students are agents in their own learning, they are able to develop the ability to think critically, flexibly and strategically. It argues that connecting learning to students' contexts; dispositions and understandings enable them to develop transposable capital to confidently acclimatise to their schooling, social circumstances, and challenges.*

**Keywords:** transposable capital, reflexivity, engagement, deliberation, dispositions, social justice, critical thinking

The full thesis can be found at <http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle.10019.1/100051>