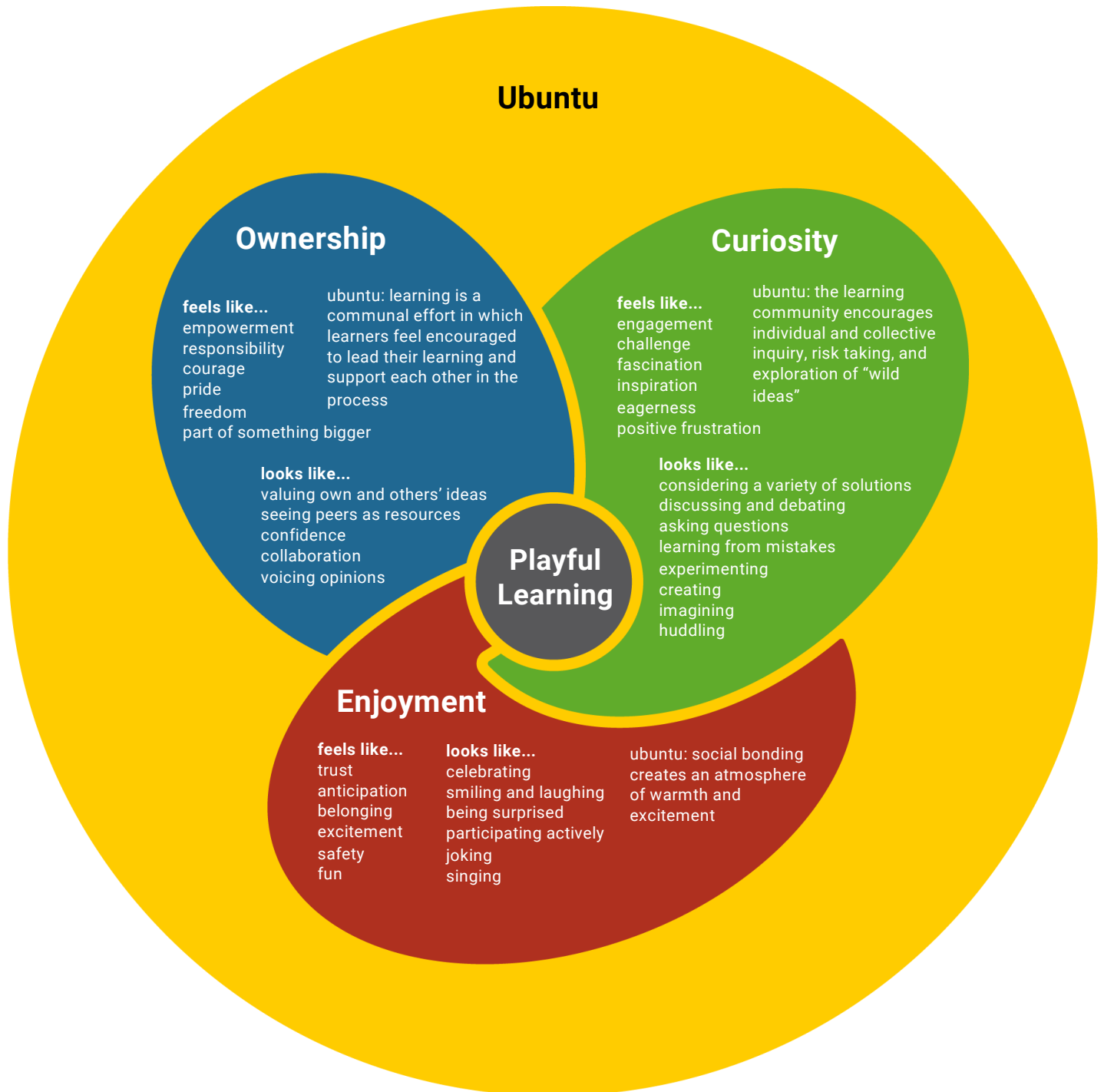


# Indicators of Playful Learning: Three South African Schools



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In each of these images learners are involved in playful learning. What does that mean in South African schools? In partnership with educators at three schools in the Johannesburg and Pretoria region, the Pedagogy of Play research team observed and interviewed adults and children ages three through fifteen (from reception through grade 7). Three categories emerged that describe the nature of learners' experience as they build understanding, knowledge, and skill through playful learning: ownership, curiosity, and enjoyment. Because playful learning includes both subjective and objective dimensions, the **Indicators of Playful Learning: Three South African Schools** represent psychological states (*feels like*) as well as observable behaviors (*looks like*). When a learner simultaneously experiences all three categories—represented by the intersection of the petals of the diagram—playful learning is likely occurring.

**Ownership** involves learners feeling empowered to lead their own learning. For the playful learner, ownership includes a sense of importance, encouragement, freedom, pride, and feeling part of something bigger than him/herself. To an observer, learners demonstrating ownership show confidence, voice opinions, value their own and other's ideas, see peers as resources, and give and receive help. They are intrinsically motivated and responsible for their learning. Ownership is the opposite of disenfranchisement. As Grade 2 teacher Kabezwane Cheze explains, "learners need to own the lesson; they need to own the classroom."

**Curiosity** involves a drive to learn more. Learners feel challenged and engaged and, at times, experience positive frustration (dissatisfaction that leads them to try harder). To an observer, curiosity involves discussing and debating, imagining, experimenting, and huddling (where learners position themselves physically close to one another). When learners are curious, they are not bored. As Grade 5 student Tadiswa explains, a lesson is exciting when she, "gets to invent, to create."

**Enjoyment** involves learning that is active and joyful, leading to feelings of anticipation, trust, fun, belonging, and safety. Learners who feel enjoyment may laugh, smile, celebrate, actively participate, and joke. As principal Maud Langa notes, when learners enjoy learning, "they are more likely to remember concepts and are more apt to attend school."

Each category includes Ubuntu, a South African concept that includes a sense of generosity, harmony, compassion, and interconnectedness. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu summarizes Ubuntu as "a person is a person through other people." Participating educators describe Ubuntu as involving love, diversity, humanity, and family. Ubuntu is highlighted here, because though ownership, curiosity, and enjoyment are experienced by individual learners, they are often manifested through a sense of togetherness in the South African educational context. Ubuntu is in evidence when, as Grade 5 learner Steve explains, "I want all my classmates to pass so I have to help them."

Our work to describe the indicators of playful learning in South Africa is provisional. We make no claims that our ideas are generalizable to all South African schools. However, we believe that they represent the voices and experiences of teachers and learners we have observed and interviewed.

