PART II The Scene Unfolds

“Racially Diverse Classrooms in Three Schools”
Chapter Five:

TEACHER’S SUBJECTIVE REALITY AND THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE IN A MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

“Everything must change at one time or another or else a static society will evolve”.
(Fullan, 2000, p. 42)

5.1 Introduction
I deal specifically with change and teachers’ responses to change in this chapter and the next, as well as teachers’ subjective reality in a changed education environment. At the heart of the chapter is the question of how teachers experience teaching in racially/culturally diverse classrooms, especially in cases where they have had little or no formal preparation for this.

“The crux of change is how individuals come to grips with this reality. We vastly underestimate both what change is… and the factors and processes that account for it…it is a fact of life” (Fullan, 2001, p. 29). All authentic change embraces a pass through the various stages of uncertainty, loss, anxiety and struggle and is characteristic in cases of real change (Marris 1975). Anxiety, frustration and confusion are elements of a teacher’s subjective reality frequently ignored by initiators of change (Fullan, 2001; Ball & Cohen, 1999; Stigler and Hiebert, 1999; Rosenholtz, 1989; Huberman, 1984; Lortie, 1975). Subjective reality in this context relates to teachers’ realities and their emotional reaction to occurrences, and the attitudes, values and beliefs that these reactions stem from. Just as school change is a global phenomenon, so too is the intensification of a teacher’s workload, which places greater demands on teachers than ever before. While teachers experience frustration concerning the pace of change, policy implementers and education managers may experience frustration at what they perceive as resistance to change (Fullan, 1991; 1999; 2000; Hargreaves, 1991; Watson, 1984).

It isn’t that people resist change as much as they don’t know how to cope with it.
(Fullan, 2000, p. xii)

Fullan (2000, p. 37) distinguishes between two forms of non-change, namely
false clarity without change and painful un-clearity without change: False clarity occurs when people think that they have changed but have only assimilated the superficial trappings of the new practice. Painful un-clearity is experienced when unclear innovations are attempted under conditions that do not support the developments of the subjective meanings of change.

(Fullan, 2000, p. 37)

These two forms of non-change that Fullan (2000) refers to is evident when change takes place, false clarity is evident when a person imagines that he or she has changed but all that has happened is that the individual does and says what is believed to be related to change. Painful clarity is more serious because the individual is not clear about how and what to change but believes that he or she has changed.

Other studies of attempted change indicate that many teachers do not experience the consolation of false clarity. For example, Huberman & Miles (1984) found that abstract goals and an injunction for teachers to implement them caused confusion, frustration, anxiety and cessation of the effort (see also Gross, Giacquinta & Bernstein, 1971 and Charters & Pellegrin, 1973). In the situations of change, teachers’ anxiety initially relates to how change will affect them on a personal level in their classrooms (their subjective reality). If subjective reality is not recognised as natural and unavoidable it can be interpreted as ignoring significant aspects of change and a misinterpretation of others (Fullan, 2000). As is evident from my discussions with teachers in this study, emotions run high in the face of change for which people are not prepared.

In this chapter I present a discussion of teachers’ subjective reality, showing how this subjective reality impacts on teachers’ perceptions of their ability in racially/culturally diverse classrooms. Many teachers believe that their initial teacher training has not prepared them for the racially diverse classrooms that they work in. This lack of preparation or training for the racially diverse classroom becomes apparent in the interviews with teachers and this aspect is given considerable attention. “In–service Training” is also discussed at length because teachers believe that they will benefit from courses dealing particularly with issues pertaining to racial diversity. In addition, some teachers argue that an appropriate background is necessary for a teacher to succeed in racially diverse classrooms.
5.2 “We can’t work with each other because we don’t know how to”

Mrs Jacob is a very warm, friendly person who is eager to share her experiences with me. Her subjective reality is characterised by anxiety about working with pupils from diverse racial backgrounds. I found this to be a common feature of the subjective reality of many of the teachers who I interviewed. They are all trying to do their best but they believe that they are not succeeding and cannot succeed because they do not have the required knowledge and skills (Fraser, 1992a, 1992b). Consider the following excerpt from my interview with Mrs Jacob:

**E P:** Do you think that you are at a disadvantage because you have not been trained to teach in a multicultural classroom?

**Mrs Jacob:** Yes, I suppose we are, because we don’t know how to work with black children because they have been brought up differently to white children and the same with Indian children is that not so? Therefore, I feel maybe, yes, we are, and I… what is hard for the pupils is that we are expecting the non-white children to be the way we want, the way white children have been brought up.

**E P:** So have your expectations changed?

**Mrs Jacob:** No, I just expect them to be the way we are. We don’t pick our noses in class, so you don’t pick your nose in class. And they will tell me that they can do that and what is wrong with it? You see there are those type of things we, that is the hardest part of it, and I think the children find it very difficult. So I don’t think that anybody has anything against children with different colours, we just can’t work with each other, because we don’t know how to. Primary school they have got less problems than we have got. Talking to friends who teach primary school they don’t get upset like I do. You know the children today drove me mad and the Indian children will always be cheeky and they are the ones always crooking or they are the ones who will always cheat more so than the others. I see that and she says [the primary teaching friend] no she doesn’t find these problems because the little people are all coming up together and I think it is good. I believe in years to come it is going to be good. It should have been already, but it isn’t at the moment, not here!

**E P:** You feel terribly frustrated. Do you feel any sense of inadequacy at times?

**Mrs Jacob:** Feel that yes! I feel that I just don’t know how to discipline them but then again I firmly believe that I don’t have to discipline; that is their job to discipline themselves, it should come from their parents. I am very, very adamant about that; other teachers are very strict disciplinarians, and I am not at all. I was never brought up that way, I didn’t go off the rails so I believe, and you must do it for yourself.

**E P:** How do you find teaching…?

**Mrs Jacob:** (interrupting) Maths is a difficult subject all right that part of it. What I found quite difficult is that black children are way behind - coming into our schools [they] are not prepared. They are not at our standard at all! So it is very difficult to teach at my standard. I have now got to go to a lower level to get
them up to us… Then I have a problem with the higher children who are bored to tears. I find that the Indian children are at a level that we are… Probably their schools are superior over the black children’s schools. …I also find that the black children have been in schools where they never had sufficient paper - and were also taught to write on a line in maths right to the end and never leave a space - and cram everything together. They are doing that still and causing endless problems in maths. So we have got to get them out of the wrong things! They are at a great disadvantage… desperately.

(Transcription 20/08/2000)

Mrs Jacob appears to be deeply agitated and frustrated. This is evident in her remark about the pupils’ behaviour. This agitation and frustration stem from the fact that in her subjective reality she is not coping in this racially diverse classroom. She is, experiencing “painful un-clarity” and the situation in which Mrs Jacob finds herself is complex, and finding clarity within complexity is a prevailing problem in the process of change (Fullan, 2000, p. 77; Marris, 1975; Schön, 1971). The major problem that exists among teachers is that they lack clarity on how they should translate the changes affecting them into practice (Fullan 2000). One of the problems that Mrs Jacob appears to be unclear about is how to deal with the diverse cognitive abilities of pupils in her class. In the interview she concedes that mathematics is a “difficult subject” yet she appears to engage in a discourse of blame for black pupils’ lack of capacity in the subject. On the other hand, she seems very clear about what she expects. This is evident in her insistence that she just wants pupils to “be like us”. Mrs Jacob is one person who is not experiencing the satisfaction of false clarity. She is confronted by unclear and unidentified changes and to justify her attitude Mrs Jacob distinguishes between the upbringing of the white, black and Indian pupils. In her view, the black and Indian pupils are not “brought up like the whites”. Consequently Mrs Jacob believes that this is probably one of the reasons for her difficulties in her racially diverse classroom.

However, there is another dimension to Mrs Jacob’s claim. Unsuspectingly, Mrs Jacob is expecting black and Indian pupils to be assimilated into this historically white school, which has an ethos that has not changed to accommodate racial diversity. Mrs Jacobs teaches at Esiphumelelayo which claims to treat all learners equally, however, Mrs Jacob’s interview appears to contradict this policy. In addition, the principal always claimed to have an “open door” policy but Mrs Jacobs did not approach her principal with these problems. An anti-racist perspective is that schools as agents of change should not endeavour to assimilate pupils who are in the minority (Todd, 1991; Garcia, 1991; Gillborn, 1995; Ladson Billing, 1995). Black and Indian pupils are in the minority at Esiphumelelayo, where Mrs Jacob teaches, and because they are in the minority, teachers expect these pupils to be assimilated. It could be argued that in order to treat all pupils equally it was necessary for the pupils to be assimilated first.
The fact that pupils are not being assimilated at the rate that she would like them to be is problematic. Mrs Jacob is also unaware that her expectation of the assimilation of African and Indian pupils is a negation of their culture entirely. An uncomplicated description of assimilation is the adaptation of the minority group to that of the majority (Giddens, 1989). This is exactly what Mrs Jacob means when she says, “I just expect them to be the way we are”. A political bias of power may be identified from Mrs Jacob’s discussion. She is in a relationship with her pupils and she employs power through which she constitutes her subjectivity and is unaware that her insistence on assimilation may be perceived as oppression (Nelson and Wright, 1995). Since Mrs Jacob is a white teacher in an historically white school she is in a position of power and, as a result of the admission of African pupils, she is unknowingly resisting the loss of power.

Despite claiming not to have any objection to racial diversity in her classroom, Mrs Jacob uses the terms “them and us” throughout her interview. This may be interpreted as Mrs Jacob being culturally insensitive, or ‘racist’. It is very difficult to identify covert racism in situations such as these. However, what comes across in an individual’s speech is often quite revealing. By using the words “us and them” Mrs Jacob inadvertently relays a message of racism, which once again can be linked with hegemony of the dominant group.

However, Mrs Jacob has a serious concern that African pupils are not sufficiently prepared for the level of education in an historically white school. These pupils are, to a certain extent, disempowered as a consequence of their previous education. Although Mrs Jacob is an experienced teacher; she believes that she is not coping with the racial diversity. Yet my observation of the 8G classroom tells a different story:

It is 10:15 and Grade 8G have just entered Mrs Jacob’s classroom. There are thirty–two pupils in this class, fourteen whites, four Indian, and twelve African; there are sixteen girls and sixteen boys. This is a fairly large classroom with thirty–three desks. The pupils sit wherever they please. The seating pattern is very interesting. The black pupils sit in the two rows with six desks each furthest from the door. The white pupils sit together in the first three rows with seven desks each and the Indian girls sit one in front of the other, as do the Indian boys, interspersed between the white pupils.

The lesson has just begun and Mrs Jacob is her usual pleasant self, with smiles all round. Pupils are very relaxed working from a transparency that Mrs Jacob has projected. Mrs Jacob walks around the classroom making comments, joking and just interacting with the pupils who respond animatedly. She then returns to the front of the classroom and begins to work through the questions on the transparency. Throughout the lesson the pupils pay
They laugh at Mrs Jacob’s jokes and joke with her in return. Although pupils speak to each other they continue working.

When Mrs Jacob asks pupils to provide answers to the problems that they have to solve from the transparency most of the answers come from an African boy. The African pupils keep to themselves and chat in the vernacular among themselves. However, the Indian pupils, despite sitting close to their friends interact with the white pupils on occasion. The pupils in this class appear to be quite happy working individually as the nature of the work that they are given requires them to do so. It is almost the end of the period and Mrs Jacob gives the pupils their homework and asks them to pack up. The siren sounds and she sends them off to enjoy the short break. Mrs Jacob and I walk up to the staff room together and she chats about the “good and bad” of teaching.

(Field notes, 16/08/2000)

In many ways this extract may be read as a period in which a teacher appears to be coping with her racially diverse class. When Mrs Jacob asked pupils to work individually from the transparency that was projected they began working immediately. As the lesson progressed, it was evident that the pupils were diligently applying themselves to the work that they were expected to complete. Although there appears to be a marked segregation in the class with regard to learner seating, the atmosphere in the classroom was very relaxed and pleasant. (See appendix D).

In some respects, there is a dissonance/lack of fit between Mrs Jacob’s subjective reality and the reality I observed over several classroom visits. She is capable, efficient and affable and copes adequately with the large numbers of pupils and their problems. She has a good rapport with all the pupils in her class, irrespective of race or culture. Perhaps this is one of the better classes that Mrs Jacob teaches.

In one of her other classes Mrs Jacob is less secure. The following extract from my Field notes on Grade 8F suggest a closer match to Mrs Jacob's subjective reality and her perceived incapacity:

Grade 8F has just arrived for their maths lesson with an abundance of noise. This is a large class with thirty-five pupils; twenty-seven of these pupils are white, seven African and one Indian. There are twenty boys and fifteen girls in this large class. Mrs Jacob immediately settles the class down and demonstrates how to work out an equation. The white pupils appear to be dominating the lesson by demanding attention and shouting out answers to any questions that Mrs Jacob asks. They appear to be keeping Mrs Jacob busy with their problems and not allowing her to attend to the other pupils in the class. Some of the black pupils sit passively staring around the classroom while the white pupils demand Mrs Jacob’s attention. It is not obvious whether this passivity is as a result of their being intimidated by the white pupils or whether they are just not interested in the lesson. There is a difference in this class. The pupils are less attentive and the atmosphere is less relaxed.
Two African girls sitting in front are talking in vernacular and giggling consistently even though they have work to do. Mrs Jacob seems to be rushing around the classroom attending to some pupils while others sit talking merrily, ignoring her instructions.

Generally the pupils in this class are more talkative and noisier than those pupils in the previous class. A group of African girls sitting near the front of the classroom pay no attention and sit chatting in vernacular and laughing out aloud. It can be assumed that their discussion has nothing to do with mathematics because of all the laughter and giggling going on. Alternatively they may find something funny about the way in which they have been working that causes the giggles. An African girl in the second row from the front sits pulling funny faces continuously; it is not obvious at whom those faces are directed. Mrs Jacob in the meanwhile is going around the classroom assisting those pupils who are experiencing problems. The noise levels are rising steadily and fewer pupils are paying attention. A number of pupils have stopped working. Pupils are shouting out “guys shoosh” as the noise levels rise. The siren sounds; it is the end of the period and Mrs Jacob dismisses the class. Relief! If I feel this relief Mrs Jacob must be equally relieved. I'll speak to her in the staff room during break.

(Field notes, 18/08/2000)

It was evident that 8F is quite a problematic class, noisier and less focused than the previous class. It was unclear whether some African pupils’ passivity was because they were just waiting their turn to be attended to or whether they were just not interested. Many of these African pupils appeared to have distanced themselves from the lesson since some were chatting in the vernacular while others giggled among themselves. An understanding of cultural factors creates an awareness that is fundamental to discerning the intrinsic necessity in transmitting culture and socialising pupils in a classroom situation (Banks & Mc Gee Banks, 1997; Ladson Billings, 1995; Garcia, 1991). Observations indicated that Mrs Jacob lacked this necessary awareness since her harassment was evident in the handling of this class.

This particular class, Grade 8F, has a majority of white pupils, yet teachers claim that classes with a majority of African pupils are noisy and problematic. Mrs Jacob’s frustration, anxiety and concern became more evident in this class. In her efforts to assist as many pupils as possible it became apparent that Mrs Jacob was not coping the way she had in the previous class. Although the pupils talked consistently throughout the lesson, not once did Mrs Jacob reprimand them. Discipline is stressed in this school, but because Mrs Jacob was so busy attending to pupils problems she appeared not to focus on the lack of discipline in this class. Although Mrs Jacob believes that her frustration is caused by pupils of other race groups she appears to be more stressed by this class of predominantly white pupils.
Teachers need to make a difference in the lives of their pupils and to accept the reality of their pupils and their cultural environment (Garcia, 1991; Fullan, 1991, 1993, 1999, 2000). It is evident that Mrs Jacob’s frustration and anxiety stem from her lack of understanding of the racial and cultural change in her classroom.

5.3 “We have not had the training for this thing”

Appropriate training or the lack thereof, lies at the heart of much of teachers’ stress. Like Mrs Jacob, many of the teachers in this study had not been trained to teach in racially/culturally diverse classrooms. Mrs Stephan from Phakamani is of German origin and trained as a teacher in Germany. Mrs Gabriel, Mrs Matthew also from Phakamani, Mrs Visser, Mrs Jacob, Miss John from Esiphumeleleyo and Mr Mark from Zama had all completed their training in racially segregated institutions in South Africa during the apartheid era and concede that their training had not prepared them for racial diversity. The training that teachers received in segregated institutions did not prepare them for multicultural classrooms (Freer, 1992). There is a need to prepare teachers for diversity in the classroom (Fraser, 1992a).

From my observations it was evident that many of the teachers encountered problems with the changes that they had to face; firstly, because of the large numbers of pupils per class; and, secondly, because of the change in classroom demographics. All the classes were both racially and culturally diverse and this change in the classroom demographics highlighted the teachers’ incapacity and their perceived incapacity.

For example Mrs Visser encounters serious problems with her pupils and is ready to retire and says “We have not had the training for this thing”. While her comment could be interpreted as a racist negation of the racially diverse classroom her intention was not to be racist. Rather her comment can be seen as arising from her frustration at not coping as she should be. Mrs Jacob claims, “I don’t cope like I used to cope…teachers generally are not coping with what we have got to deal with because I feel the teachers…I don’t cope like I used to cope”, she reiterates. Mr Mark states that there were times when he wanted to leave and Mrs Visser believes that she should retire because she is over fifty. These are typical examples of painful un-clarity where teachers are at a loss as to what to do. Teachers claim that the lack of training is a significant reason why many of them are not managing in these racially/culturally diverse classrooms. Interviews with more recently trained teachers provided little evidence to suggest that more recent teacher
training caters for racial/cultural-diversity needs. An interview with Ms Lazarus from Esiphumelelayo confirms this notion:

**E P:** Did you perhaps have any preparation or training for the culturally or racially diverse classroom that you find yourself in?

**Ms Lazarus:** No, I don’t think that my teacher training prepared me for this. No, I don’t think so, nothing I can see would relate to any of this in fact.

**E P:** What about multicultural education?

**Ms Lazarus:** Multicultural education…just a very little extent. And it was in Education. I took Education. And basically, what we did was look at the biases with which we work and generally enlighten them or highlight them in our own lives. And I said that it is wrong that a teacher, especially when you are teaching Home Ec where it’s generally not African… It could become African if you… I don’t know how to work it… just change it.

**E P:** Do you believe that Home Ec [Home Economics] is taught from a western perspective?

**Ms Lazarus:** I think it depends who is teaching it and how you have been trained, definitely.

Ms Lazarus firmly believes that she lacks the capacity to work in a racially diverse classroom and, as a result, she claims that she is frustrated. Ms Lazarus is a novice and is unable to adapt to the change in her classroom population and thus experiences problems; consequently she is unhappy and anxious. To add to Ms Lazarus’ problems it is apparent that some African pupils in her class appear to lack interest in Home Economics. They are disruptive and argue with Ms Lazarus when she reprimands them. Although Ms Lazarus believes that she is not making progress there are other African pupils who enjoyed the lesson that I observed and paid very close attention to Ms Lazarus. At times Ms Lazarus could have been described as if she was in a state of painful un-clarity when she sounds helpless in the interview. At a later stage in the interview it is evident that she is in a state of false clarity.

The behaviour of a few pupils cannot be generalised across all the classes. It is unclear whether the bad behaviour in this class is a result of the lesson content being taught from a western perspective or whether these pupils are just deviant. I suspect the latter, as I have observed these pupils in other classes and their behaviour is the same in every class. I found it strange that no intervention was evident since these pupils are exhibiting the same behaviour in every class and discipline is very high on the agenda at Esiphumelelayo. However, I interpreted these pupils’ behaviour according to Nelson and Wright’s (1995)
explanation of power that is exerted by the subjugated minority in this case, the minority being the African pupils as “power over” and as a form of resistance.

Those younger teachers who reported that they had received some preparation in multicultural education often spoke of the very limited or optional aspects of their relevant courses. Most teachers did not choose this option since their training was conducted during the apartheid era and there was little chance that they would teach racially integrated classes at the time. Miss Luke, a young, enthusiastic first—year teacher from Zama, complained that she had problems dealing with pupils from other race groups and their non co-operation in class. There is a senior teacher who was appointed as a Grade coordinator at Zama where Ms Luke teaches but it is apparent that the Grade coordinator was not helping her. Although she had completed her teaching practice in the school where she is now teaching, she still had problems because she believed that she was not prepared at university for the situation she now found herself in.

**E P:** Have you had any training to prepare you for the multicultural classroom?

**Ms Luke:** We did a whole section on multi-literacies and multiculturalism in our English Methodology; we used different texts from different cultures so I had some basic idea. But university does not prepare you for teaching! The practical side of it gives you all the tools to get the knowledge and give it across to the pupils, but it doesn’t prepare you for the relationship between the pupils and how you are going to have to deal with it. No, I don’t believe it’s possible.

**E P:** What was the greatest challenge that you had to face?

**Ms Luke:** So far um, at the moment, and I think it’s just because where I am, I had a major problem on Friday with a specific class… just that I felt totally ganged up upon because I am the completely opposite culture to the whole class. And they refused to speak English to me… I [pause] just at the moment I’m trying to deal with that bow to get across, actually, they are refusing to speak English in my classroom. I was trying to teach a poem to them; they wouldn’t answer my questions to them. They were talking to each other in their own language then laughing. I felt totally excluded and I didn’t know how to get across that. The more I kind of spoke to them about it the more they excluded me. Until, I eventually said, “I can’t teach like this”. And I had to call my HOD and ask her to do her bit. Because I just felt that, it was absolutely no communication and that they were blocking it off and that is something I have got to get through. I’ve still got to see them again, try, and see if I can get past the barrier. I don’t know why it’s suddenly there.

**E. P:** What do you intend to do?

**Ms Luke** Well actually my HOD bombarded them and if they don’t follow my instructions and they don’t participate, I don’t have to teach them; they can go and sit with her. Which kind of scared them. So I
Ms Luke repeats the words “I don’t know” at least five times in the excerpt and there is a tone of bewilderment in the manner in which she says “I don’t know”. Ms Luke’s subjective reality is clearly one of painful un-clarity. “Teachers all over the world are feeling beleaguered” (Fullan, 2000, p. 117). Teaching makes considerable demands on teachers and gives little in return and teacher training does not prepare teachers for the realities of the classroom. For both the novice and experienced teacher there are significant classroom issues of control and discipline, which are major preoccupations (Fullan, 2000). The three schools insist on teachers exerting control and maintaining discipline but in many instances it is obvious that these teachers are not succeeding. None of the three schools had any policy on discipline but it was expected that one of the functions of the teacher would be to enforce discipline.

In order to help teachers develop their classroom management skills it is important to address their emotional responses to events around them and the attitudes, values and beliefs that underlie these responses. With the aim of assisting Ms Luke to deal with her problems it was necessary for some form of intervention that would take Ms Luke's subjective reality into consideration. The Head of Department’s intervention addressed only the pupils’ and not Ms Luke’s problems. Despite the Head of Department threatening the pupils into subservience, Ms Luke’s subjective reality indicates a sense of helplessness conveyed to me in her anguished tone of voice during the interview.

Power relations are evident in the action that the HOD took. In this case the person wielding the power, the HOD, “bombarded” and threatened the pupils”. This obviously is as a result of her power as HOD. The pupils’ problems were not addressed, nor did the HOD investigate the problem; instead she hoped to “scare them into submission”. Once again this resistance could be interpreted as “power over” (Nelson & Wright 1995). On the other hand, these pupils need to be treated as people, as individuals who require some recognition since change also affects them and not only the teachers (Fullan, 2000). Motivation and relationship go hand in hand and the ideas of the cognitive scientists and the insights of the sociologists on how to engage all pupils should be combined. They indicate how power relations in the school should be changed if schools are to advance (Goleman, 1995, 1998).
Many teachers believe that for teachers to succeed with teaching in culturally/racially diverse classrooms there should be some form of intervention to help them to cope with change. Ms Lazarus believes that she would benefit from courses that deal specifically with racially/cultural diversity. Miss Luke appreciates the course that the school sent her on earlier in the year, but found that it did not address her needs. Mr Mark, also from Zama, believes that some form of intervention is necessary if teachers are to cope in culturally/racially diverse classrooms. Many teachers said that they would welcome the introduction of in-service training courses (INSET). In all three schools teachers indicated an eagerness to attend such courses.

In the UK INSET plays an important role in assisting teachers to work with the “cultural diversity” of many of the schools where there is a predominance of Afro-Caribbean and Asian pupils. Teachers in the UK see the need to attend such courses, and the school management has taken it upon itself to present such courses to the teachers who needed them (Cole, 1990; Gillborn, 1995). I was curious about both experienced and novice teachers’ attitudes to INSET and, as a result, this was investigated in my study.

**E P:** Do you think you would benefit from in-service training in multicultural/multiracial teaching, perhaps?

**Ms Lazarus:** Yes! Definitely! I think that it would be wonderful because the other teachers that are my age and that trained with me are also battling terribly with the cultural changes. As a teacher, I don’t think I handle the various cultural groups well. Last week there was a student, black students who didn’t have their home E.C. things. So I got them to wash the basins and the one girl put Handy Andy in one of the white girl’s hair and I lost my temper with that and they had to go and see Mr Christian. And the parent was very upset because the white girl’s hair had to be cut off. And then I just find that the work given to the black students never gets done the way that you expect it of them and they don’t listen to instructions in class, so they don’t know what to do anyway. Perhaps I don’t relate to them as well as someone of their own culture would and that is why they don’t listen to me because they don’t see the value of it. I am not too sure.

**E P:** Have you tried speaking to the pupils to find out what is the problem?

**Ms Lazarus:** Yes, I have. Eventually I saw one of the parents at Parents’ Evening. I spoke to her about the problem and she felt that I was being unjust and she went straight to Mr Christian because she thought I was treating the pupil unfairly; err her child. And so eventually I met the mother and I said to the mother “It is actually your child who is not pulling her weight”. And um since then the pupil has not worked any more. So her attitude hasn’t changed. But I was the one who got into trouble for it. So I have spoken to them but it does not help me in my life it is just creating problems.

**EP:** What specifically is problematic?
**Ms Lazarus:** I must say that the white students and black students they don’t work together well at all. I don’t know what they are like out of school or at home but I am constantly having to moan at the black students for interfering with the white students’ work or taking their work. One of the girls accused one of the black girls of stealing the other girl’s cake and I think it actually did happen because I have had problems with her on previous occasions when she has done stupid things or things that are not good. So she is going to have to come back during break.

Although the initial question that I asked related to INSET Ms Lazarus’ agreed then launched into the problems that she had experienced. From this excerpt Ms Lazarus’ subjective reality surfaces. At this school, Esiphumelelayo, only the girls take Home Economics as a subject. At Phakamani both boys and girls take what they refer to as “Home” Tech and I found that there were fewer problems in the kitchen than at Esiphumelelayo. Mrs Paul, the Home Tech teacher at Phakamani, has many years of experience in teaching the subject and, despite not being a strict disciplinarian is able to control the classes that she teaches. It is not possible to identify the reason why Mrs Paul’s class at Phakamani is less problematic than Ms Lazarus’ class at Esiphumelelayo. Perhaps it could be attributed to Mrs Paul’s experience or the gender mix in her class.
Ms Lazarus’ age and lack of experience appear to be a disadvantage. Pupils seem to disregard her and ignore her totally. Ms Lazarus claims that the reason why she has problems is because of her culture. This could perhaps be explained by Dolby’s (2001) assertion that our ideas of culture are linked to geographical location. However, underlying the cultural difference is a more serious problem. In her interview Ms Lazarus makes sweeping statements and generalisations about black pupils and in certain statements that she makes there is evidence of false clarity. However, at other times when speaking to Ms Lazarus one can detect the pain in her voice and the sadness in her eyes as she relates her story. To add to her woes she has to deal with parents who hold her responsible for their children’s bad behaviour. My field notes of a particular lesson that I observed clearly illustrate Ms Lazarus’ experiences in a Home Economics lesson:

Home Economics at 7:45 with Ms Lazarus. The girls from Grades 8F and 8K combine for this period while the boys from these classes go to Technical Drawing. Some pupils had not completed their homework and Ms Lazarus punished them by not allowing them to bake. A senior Home Economics teacher took it upon herself to discipline these pupils who incidentally were mainly from 8K and all black African girls. Since this teacher has a free period these pupils spent this double period in her classroom. Only thirteen pupils out of thirty–four were allowed to bake. Pupils were instructed to work in pairs. As seems to be the practice, black pupils paired off with black pupils, one Indian girl with a white girl and the other Indian girl with a black girl. The remaining white pupils formed pairs.

Andrea, a learner commented, “the class is so nice and quiet for a change”.

Nthabiseng did not bring her apron to class so she was not allowed to bake. Ms Lazarus had written the recipe on the chalkboard and she reads through the recipe and explains as she goes along what she wants the pupils to do. Ms Lazarus asks pupils to follow the recipe and first weigh the ingredients. Ayanda appeared not to be following instructions. She measures out her ingredients and proceeds to mix all the ingredients. Ms Lazarus loses her temper and tells Ayanda that she will not have anyone who cannot follow instructions and who cannot understand in her class, Since Ayanda has made a mess and does not know what to do she begins eating the raw mixture. The African girls in this class really appear to be having problems. It is obvious to me that they are battling because they are not paying attention to Ms Lazarus and they are in fact not following her instructions. The pupils who are paying attention are managing very well. The pair comprising the Indian girl and the white girl has made their batter too runny.

Ntombi and Zenele have doubled their ingredients and Ms Lazarus is furious and tells them to sort themselves out as to how they are going to fill the pans. By this time Ms Lazarus is beginning to show strain and intense frustration.
The cakes are now in the oven and pupils have been instructed to weigh out the icing sugar. Ms Lazarus in the meantime is walking around to each of the pairs when she discovers that Tebogo has made her batter a bright blue. Since the cakes are ready to come out of the oven it is too late for Tebogo to bake her cakes. Ms Lazarus is livid and says that Tebogo will have to throw the batter away; instead, Tebogo begins to eat the raw batter.

While Ms Lazarus is walking around to the various workstations she points out problems to pupils. The African girls are very arrogant and rude to Ms Lazarus. When she questions the pupils about the task that they have just completed many of the black pupils refuse to answer. They talk among themselves in the vernacular and ignore Ms Lazarus. By this time it is evident that Ms Lazarus is beyond frustration – ‘saved by the bell’ the siren sounds – these pupils don’t wait to be dismissed but just dash out of the classroom. I heave an enormous sigh of relief. I can just imagine Ms Lazarus’ relief.

(Field notes, 21/08/2000)

The principal intention of this extract is to demonstrate the position of the African pupils as well as Ms Lazarus’ subjective reality. Ms Lazarus is in a state of painful un-clarity as she appears not to know what to do (Fullan, 2000). The majority of the African pupils’ lack of interest was apparent since they had not done their homework and, according to Ms Lazarus, this was not the first time. There was an apparent lack of concern on the part of the pupils that they would be missing out on a practical lesson. Many of the African pupils did not follow Ms Lazarus’ instructions and, as a result, wasted the ingredients. What was evident in this lesson was Ms Lazarus’ subjective reality. The African pupils in particular and an Indian girl had great difficulty comprehending Ms Lazarus’ instructions, which were very clear. Although many of the pupils appeared to be enjoying themselves, many messed with the flour and sugar, and they used their hands to mix instead of a wooden spoon. They also licked their fingers, continuously tasting the batter. Three girls, Claire, Joanne and Kanthi, followed Ms Lazarus’ instructions and their attempts were a success, while others were not so successful.

During a casual conversation I asked Mrs Vermaak, a senior Home Economics teacher, what the reason could be for the African pupils’ behaviour in the Home Economics class. She replied that she believed that it was possibly because “blacks did not do much cooking in their homes”. I asked her why she thought this, she replied “pap (ground maize porridge) and vleis (meat) does not require much cooking”. The dominant stories told about the African pupils always appear to be blaming the pupils for their lack of performance, yet the school did not seem to have made any explicit attempt to make pupils from the diverse racial backgrounds feel comfortable or welcome. Esiphumelelayo, Phakamani and Zama all claimed to have welcomed their black (generic) learners. However, from the incidents related and the treatment of the learners there appears to be a contradiction. In all three schools in this study the
numbers of African pupils had increased significantly but, as mentioned previously, the ethos of the schools remained unchanged.

INSET would not only be welcomed by the novice teachers, but mature teachers also indicated that they would also welcome INSET.

**E P:** If the Department had to introduce in-service training for multicultural classrooms as they are doing for OBE do you think you would benefit from it?

**Mrs Jacob:** Teachers are being sent on OBE courses, which they are battling with. Why aren’t we being sent on courses that would help with coping in culturally diverse classroom? I think it would be a good idea, I don’t know, I don’t know what else they can do for us. Although I am so negative today, I just can’t see any hope. I don’t know what they can do for us. However, I do think possibly it would, I personally would appreciate a course to help me because I would like to see how I could be less agitated by the whole set up. Because I know too much of the past. The newer teachers don’t seem to be troubled like me at all. They are not fazed at all. I have my son as I have said in a school with many, many young teachers. He says it is just chaos in most classes, nobody seems to worry, and they don’t seem to care. I take it too seriously. I don’t want anybody wasting any time, so I don’t know whether it is just a matter of over caring or just what? But yes, if there was some help I would like it. The majority of mature, experienced teachers are just as frustrated as I am. I don’t know what they said to you.

Mrs Jacob says that INSET would be a good idea, although in the next line she comes across as being quite despondent because she repeats herself when she says, “I don’t know what else they (Department of Education) can do for us”. Mrs Jacob’s reference to the past consolidates her expectations of all pupils conforming and being the way she wants them to be. Here is evidence that INSET in racially/culturally diverse education would be welcomed. Ms Lazarus refers to her contemporaries who are “battling” and Mrs Jacobs refers to experienced teachers who are frustrated. Mrs Jacob firmly believes that this is a problem only the mature teachers are experiencing.

Most of the teachers interviewed indicated that they would welcome courses on racial diversity and firmly believed that all teachers should be sent on these courses. “Once teachers were coping in the multicultural classrooms then OBE could follow”, said Mrs Jacob. Mrs Gabriel, Mrs Matthew and Ms John from Phakamani, Mrs Timothy, Miss Luke and Mr Mark from Zama firmly believe that INSET would contribute towards assisting teachers to deal with the multiracial classroom. The pattern emerging here is that many teachers feel that their training has been inadequate for the change to multiracial classrooms in which they find themselves, and that INSET courses would benefit them considerably to deal with this change.
The initial teacher-training course should be underpinned by a true multicultural approach to education and should ensure that every aspect of the course serves to develop an understanding of a multiracial and culturally diverse society (Cole, 1990; Fraser, 1992a; Freer 1993). With regard to INSET, Troyna (1993) warns that there may be some teachers who are in favour of INSET, while others are not and that this could cause problems with the implementation of such courses within a school. Lyseight–Lazarus (1990) maintains that the school principal is central to such initiatives, and needs to be self-motivated. The INSET course may be an initiative of the school and not necessarily a “Departmental” initiative.

Although attempts had been made at the three schools to provide some form of multicultural orientation or training, teachers claim that these were inadequate. The principal of Zama, who was a member of staff at the time, invited experts in the field, Professor Lemmer and Professor Squelch from the University of South Africa (UNISA), to visit Zama and enlighten teachers on multicultural education.

5.4 “Some teachers don’t have the background”

Some teachers believe that in order to succeed with the racial and cultural changes in the classroom composition one needs to have the relevant background or experience. In general, what emanated from my interviews is that white middle-class teachers are of the opinion that they have a particular cultural identity to maintain. This attitude endorses the claim that the ethos of all three schools has not changed. Past experience and interaction have provided some teachers with the ability to confront and deal with the changes in their classrooms, as is evident from the following quotation.

The assumptions that we carry around with us, those created by our advantages and our past injuries, affect how we see students in our classrooms and schools.

(Liston and Zeichner, 1996, p. 79)

Mrs Michael from Phakamani firmly believes that her background experiences have been more influential than her formal training in preparing her to cope with change in “the new South African classroom”:

**E P:** Do you think your training prepared you adequately for the multicultural classroom?

**Mrs Michael:** No! I don't think that teacher training gave me that. I think that… I think that it came more from outside influence, especially working in a multicultural youth group, with youth groups, um being Anglican which is very multicultural and I think that made… that made a difference or me teaching. Not the training college!
**E P:** So you got your multicultural experience from your church background. Can you elaborate?

**Mrs Michael:** Yes, mostly from that because I suppose that’s where my - I don’t know what you call it - my feelings of… of you know that education should have been like this when I was at school. Because I grew up with especially at home, my home environment was very open. How do I explain this? Non-racist would be the best way to explain it. And I think that’s where I had an advantage and why I can deal - why I am happy in - the situation I am in now.

**E P:** So do you believe as a result of this you have a good relationship with the diverse cultural and racial groups you encounter?

**Mrs Michael:** Yes, I have a good relationship with all groups, even when it was frowned upon in the apartheid years I had black friends and that is the situation I grew up in which I think is very different to a lot of, of other teachers.

Mrs Michael believes that she has an advantage over her colleagues because of her background. She is the only teacher in my research sample experiencing a sense of “clarity” (genuine clarity) or confidence to work in a racially diverse classroom. The following observations from my field notes offer a sketch of this.

History 13:10 – 14:00 - Last lesson of the afternoon – (I am reminded of the D H Lawrence poem that I had taught aeons ago and I realised the truth in that poem. What a tiring day this has been. Following these kids around from class to class, trying to observe and listen and keep alert while the elements attacked me in the mathematics classroom. What next? History – boring? We’ll see).

Mrs Michael stands at the door and welcomes pupils with a broad beaming smile. She does not belong to the military school of “straight line freaks”. Pupils enter the classroom chatting and laughing and sit down at their desks wherever they chose. This is a large class of thirty-five pupils and at least half the class is African). There are six Indian pupils and the remainder of the pupils is white. The black pupils are seated at the back of the classroom and the white and Indian pupils towards the front of the classroom in their own race groups. Three Indian boys and three white boys sit together in all the classes (by now I had established that these pupils were good friends).

The classroom is large and airy and there is sufficient space for the thirty-five pupils. The desks are arranged in single rows and pupils sit one behind the other. The walls are decorated with charts depicting the various periods in history as well as charts on contemporary history. The pupils did much of the work displayed.

There is a very comfortable atmosphere in the classroom and the pupils appear to be very relaxed. Mrs Michael hands out the task to be completed. Very little interaction was necessary and pupils worked without any disruption. As the pupils progressed with their work the noise level began to rise. Mrs Michael says that she does not like to tell pupils to
be quiet as this kills their spirit. Pupils should be allowed to be themselves and should not be inhibited in any way. She believes that if pupils are told to be quiet they might withdraw and not perform to the optimum. She allows pupils to talk freely even if the noise levels rise, she says she can cope. She excuses herself to hand out the next piece of work and suggests that pupils try to work with classmates from other race groups but the pupils ask her if they can work with their friends. Mrs Michael agrees and everyone is happy. This class is one of the most problematic classes that I have been with for the past three days. It is unbelievable that these pupils are so well behaved and visibly happy in Mrs Michael’s class. Is there any truth in what Mrs Michael claims about background experience? I wonder. All too soon this enjoyable period comes to an end. Mrs Michel gives the pupils their homework, dismisses the class and thanks me for my visit.

(Field notes, 20/08/1999)

Mrs Michael shows no signs of stress and is quite at ease in the classroom. I observed that generally pupils responded well to Mrs Michael and she had no problems with any pupils in any of her classes during the six periods that I spent with her. Mrs Michael is the only teacher who did not complain about change, nor did she complain about frustration. All that she could talk about was her joy that education had changed for the better. I was beginning to wonder whether there was any validity in her claim that her background had worked to her advantage.

Whereas Mrs Michael from Phakamani had gained her multicultural experience from her interactions in the context of her church, Mrs Timothy from Zama gained hers from growing up in a multicultural environment in another country. Mrs Timothy believes that because she was raised in a multicultural context she has the preparation needed to deal with the situation that exists in her classroom today.

_E P:_ Do you believe that your background experiences influence your teaching in a multicultural classroom?

_Mrs Timothy:_ I was brought up in Mozambique and I myself never had a class or attended a school where I was the only person of that race. I was always in a multicultural environment and it was only when I went to Rhodesia, as it was then, that I went into a white cultural environment. I actually found it disconcerting… when I was in a white–only environment… not having other cultures.

_E P:_ So has your background helped you to cope with your pupils? What is your relationship with your pupils?

_Mrs Timothy:_ There are um, generally I have got a very good relationship with them… There are a few pupils that I do have a problem with, not generally…not on race colour issues. Um, not I mean… not just because we are different colour… um their behaviour, their personality… um I have got one class that when some of these particular pupils are absent, we can actually get on with constructive work, and again if I look at background it’s their backgrounds. It is what’s, what kind of home they come from and I think that accounts for - it is across the cultural groups.
There is an obvious dissonance between Mrs Timothy’s subjective reality and the observed reality. Mrs Timothy’s painful un-clarity is evident. In addition, she blames the learners’ backgrounds since she believes that her background is ideal. She does not answer my question but launches into an explanation of her background experiences. Although Mrs Timothy believes that her background experience is an advantage she always seems terribly stressed and agitated, as is evident from my field notes.

This is a very large class comprising forty pupils. There are sixteen Africans), three Indians, twenty-one whites, sixteen girls, and twenty-four boys. Mrs Timothy does not come to the door. The pupils just saunter in, chatting among themselves. Mrs Timothy waits to greet them. They quieten down and she greets them.

Once again it is the last lesson of the afternoon, Geography, and to make matters worse pupils are given their test scripts to review. Could anything be more boring? However, I need not have been afraid of dozing off at the back of the classroom where I am sitting because the noise level is just about sufficient to awaken the dead.

I can appreciate Mrs Timothy’s frustration, as this class is totally unresponsive. Craig and Bryan who have been misbehaving the entire day are putting on their “best” performance in this class. They punch each other, giggle, and swear at each other. In the meanwhile Mrs Timothy is trying to review the test with the rest of the class who are just as badly behaved. Celeste and some girls are fooling around, giggling and whispering to each other. Mrs Timothy is quite angry and she says, “Why don’t you stop trying to attract the boys’ attention and get on with your work”? Mrs Timothy has projected the test memorandum on the overhead projector and pupils are to take down corrections. Another two white boys have been giggling ever since they entered the classroom. They are giggling continuously and it is beginning to irritate me. They are not doing any work at all. They haven’t even begun to take down the corrections. The noise levels are rising steadily and I can feel a headache coming on. I sympathise with Mrs Timothy who seems to be astonished by the behaviour of the pupils. By this time of the day Mrs Timothy looks tired and as if she has had enough. This class is tiresome. While poor Mrs Timothy continues with the test corrections Jarred sticks paper up his nostrils and calls to two of the girls, Knavish and Rocha, who giggle stupidly. He then shows his antics to Shane next to him, who in turn slaps him on the back as if to say well done and they burst out laughing aloud. The African boys and girls continue talking in the vernacular among themselves and appear not to be doing anything constructive. Patrick and Maria have not even opened their books but sit chatting to each other, laughing out aloud. Thalami who was trying to work told Craig to shut up as he was disrupting the class while some pupils were trying to work

By this time Mrs Timothy looks as if she is ready to tear her hair out. The class is rowdy, unco-operative and generally badly behaved. she asks pupils whether they are misbehaving because I am visiting the class. (I have been with this horrid class the entire day so I am almost sure it not because of my presence). Thandi attracts Mrs Timothy’s attention by her raucous laughter. Mrs Timothy reminds her that she is repeating Grade 8 and says it looks
as if she'll be happy to spend another year in Grade 8. When Mrs Timothy turns around to attend to a learner who wants some help Jonathan begins interfering with some of the girls, Priya, Shanti, Refilwe and Nthabiseng. He makes funny actions and sticks up his middle finger. The girls exchange glances and ignore him. There seems to be no control in this class. A group of African) pupils, both boys and girls, leave their seats, and walk around the classroom talking loudly. All the time Mrs Timothy tries to gain control but this class is beyond control. What a welcome the sound I am absolutely exhausted as I have spent the entire day with these “pains”. Mrs Timothy apologises to me for the behaviour and reiterates that she is not sure whether they behaved in that manner because of my presence, which could have been the case.

(Field notes 06/10/2000)

When I wrote these field notes, I realised that they had been written after “a bad day with this class”. My own annoyance and frustration with this class as social actors and my own sense of being unable to do anything are illuminated in my descriptions of the day. The problem with this class is their behaviour, which inhibits the progress of those pupils who want to work. This is one of the most problematic classes that I have ever encountered in the three schools. The pupils are arrogant and have no interest in their work. However, the problems are not merely academic. Delinquency plays a major role and the fact that these pupils do not respond to reprimands and punishment indicates that there may be serious underlying social problems. Although this school is situated in the north–west of the city in a fairly affluent area, it is close to the main transport routes. As a result, pupils who attend this school are from the surrounding townships, the less affluent suburbs to the south and east of the school, as well as from the less affluent city centre. It is not to generalise or make sweeping statement about the pupils but the mere fact that two entire breaks are spent on assemblies trying to punish pupils for bad behaviour is evidence that there are problems with behaviour at Zama but unfortunately the problems are not being addressed correctly.

Observations provided evidence that Mrs Timothy’s background had no significant influence on her teaching. This particular class that I have discussed in my field notes is a very difficult class, and displayed their reluctance to work in all the classes that I attended with them.

Both Mrs Timothy and Mrs Naidoo have had experience in other countries yet the effects of this experience are different. Mrs Timothy’s subjective reality evidently indicates that she has little success in her classes. Mrs Naidoo from Esiphumelelayo is convinced that her experiences in a multicultural classroom, as well as her time spent in the United States of America, have equipped her for the racially diverse classroom, which she finds “almost normal”. Whereas Mrs Timothy experiences painful un-clarity
at times, there are others when she is experiencing false clarity Mrs Naidoo may be described as experiencing a sense of clarity (genuine clarity).

**EP:** How do you actually find teaching in this multicultural school?

**Mrs Naidoo:** For me, it's almost normal. It is fine, because I went to err, a private school, which was multiracial. And then I went to the States for a year, so I was exposed to even more multicultural activities, education and everything else, um and then, so coming to high school and teaching in a multicultural environment is second nature.

**EP:** Do you think that your experience has actually helped you?

**Mrs Naidoo:** Definitely, definitely the multicultural education that I received definitely helped me and I think there should be more of an emphasis on it. For me it was just part of my course but there should be more.

There should be more emphasis put on it simply because we are in South Africa. Simply because we live in South Africa, we have such diverse cultures in South Africa yet we haven’t been taught how to deal with it.

Because I mean when I went to the States you get all these different cultures but they are all American. Do you know what I mean? It is almost as if their nationality unites them and that does not really apply to South Africa. We are all South African but because of our past, that doesn’t unite us.
Mrs Naidoo is a first–year teacher whose background appears to have worked to her advantage. She did not complain about the racial diversity of her classes. However, as the extract from my field notes shows, there is evidence that Mrs Naidoo did experience difficulties, although it was not with cultural diversity. Mrs Naidoo was quite emphatic that her knowledge of multicultural education had benefited her since she had chosen an option on Multicultural Education for her undergraduate degree - over and above this, she had studied in the USA.

From my observations of Mrs Naidoo in the classroom, it was apparent that she managed very well. She had a good rapport with the pupils and the pupils were generally well behaved in her class, even though she also had the pupils from the lower end of the academic range who were notorious for their bad behaviour. Mrs Naidoo encouraged pupils’ involvement in the lesson and encouraged their input. Here is evidence of clarity (genuine clarity) as Mrs Naidoo did not appear to be experiencing the painful un-clarity or false clarity that some of her white counterparts were experiencing. An account of a lesson in Mrs Naidoo’s classroom, taken from my field notes, follows:

It is 11:15 and Mrs Naidoo waits at her classroom door for the infamous 8F. The pupils enter the classroom in an orderly fashion. This is new to me; they normally push and shove and make a din. Pupils walk to their seats without any fuss and bother. The seating arrangement in this classroom is part of Mrs Naidoo’s plan to integrate pupils. In a way it is a type of enforced integration. However, it is difficult when twenty–seven of the thirty–five pupils are white. This is a very colourful classroom. The walls are covered with bright charts and pictures relating to literature and English in general. The pupils settle down very quickly and take out their literature text books, which happens to be “Across the Barricades,” which is a delightful story about an Irish Catholic boy, Kevin, who falls in love with an Irish Protestant girl, Sadie.

The lesson begins with Mrs Naidoo reading aloud from the text while pupils follow in their texts. Zenele who wants to know the meaning of “prerogative” interrupts Mrs Naidoo. She explains the meaning of the word writes it on the chalkboard and continues reading. In the meantime, Andrew sits staring out the window and pays no attention, nor does he follow the text. Bridget, on the other hand, writes industriously as Mrs Naidoo explains various themes and aspects of the story. Prakash, the only Indian boy in the class, sits doodling in his book and does not pay any attention to the lesson.

Mrs Naidoo stops reading and gets the pupils involved in reading. She asks Joanne to read, who reads very well, and attempts to explain what she has just read. Stephen is then asked to read but he cannot read properly. He has problems pronouncing the words and reads haltingly. In addition, he is unable to explain what he has just read. What surprises me is that these pupils are very well behaved in Mrs Naidoo’s class. In fact, they are almost pleasant to be with.
It is now Jabu’s turn to read. He also has some problems reading, but generally he manages and is even able to attempt an explanation. When Phillip is asked to read he falters and trips over the words. He is unable to read fluently and cannot pronounce the word “khaki”. The reading has come to an end and Mrs Naidoo proceeds to check on work that had to be completed during her absence the previous day. Anthony had not completed his work and promises Mrs Naidoo that he will “catch it all up”. Sean, who has not done the work, makes an excuse that he did not have a pen at school the previous day so he was unable to do the work. Mrs Naidoo speaks to him very firmly and points out the error of falling behind with the work. It is apparent that Mrs Naidoo has good control of this otherwise troublesome class.

It is almost the end of the period and Mrs Naidoo gives the class their homework and reminds them about the importance of doing homework timeously. The siren sounds and the class is dismissed. Not once throughout the lesson did Mrs Naidoo have to reprimand or punish a learner. She is very relaxed as are the pupils. The atmosphere in the classroom is very pleasant and overall it is difficult to believe that this is the same 8F that causes other teachers endless problems.

(Field notes, August 2000)

Grade 8F was badly behaved in all the other classes. The only two classes where the teachers had good control were in the English and History classes. At the outset it was evident that pupils would behave in this classroom. The African pupils did not speak to each other in the vernacular or giggle uncontrollably. In many ways the extract can be interpreted as a conscious effort on Mrs Naidoo’s part to make the pupils realise the importance of good work. Mrs Naidoo is an industrious teacher who knows that she is achieving her aims. She firmly believes that it is her background experiences that impact on her ability to function the way she does.

5.5 Summary

Teachers’ subjective reality emerged very clearly from their interviews. Of the six teachers introduced in this chapter only two teachers’ subjective reality indicated that there was genuine clarity. The other four wavered between painful un-clarity and false clarity.

Teacher training did not prepare teachers for the multicultural classroom, but despite my attempts to elicit information about teachers’ attitudes towards INSET some teachers agreed that it was necessary and reverted to their diatribe against black pupils. Although teachers believe that they experience difficulty with change, pupils also feel the impact of change. The next chapter deals specifically with teachers
perceptions of change with regard to teaching methods, language, and discipline. Pupils’ perceptions are also included in an attempt to clarify the emotions pupils’ experience.