Chapter Six:

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT LANGUAGE AND DISCIPLINE

“Perceptions are often a function of the phenomenal world in which actors are living”.

(Fullan, 1992, p.80)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is an extension of the previous chapter. Here I consider teachers’ perceptions of language and discipline as a result of the changed classroom demographics, and also towards the end of the chapter, I introduce the perceptions of pupils. The two main themes dealt with in this chapter are language and discipline. I also occasionally allude to the central themes of the previous chapter, which are subjective reality, un-clarity, and painful un-clarity and change.

Schools have changed from monolingual to multilingual environments and one of the major problems that teachers encountered was with the pupils’ use of the English language. The issue of language may have political dimensions, as Desai and Van der Merwe (1998, p. 248) argue and is used to separate the powerful from the powerless. During the previous dispensation English and Afrikaans were the official languages. Now that South Africa has eleven official languages, English remains the dominant language and the medium of instructions in many schools. For this reason teachers insist that pupils should have a strong English background in order to succeed because the language of instruction is English.

6.2 “…language was a very big problem”

E P: Could you share your experiences of teaching in a racially diverse classroom?

Mrs Gabriel: Um the thing that I find most frustrating is when they communicate amongst themselves in a language I don’t understand. I teach in the medium [pause] the instruction of the school, which is English. Um when they try to help each other or talk or ‘skinner’ [gossip] to each other I don’t know what they are saying in the other language and that to me is a frustration, which I try to discourage reminding the children that the language of instruction is English and that I address them in English and I expect them to speak in English; something that I can understand as well.
At the end of the interview Mrs Gabriel suggested

**Mrs Gabriel:** Um there may be children need to be if the me… language of instruction is English that may be the children need to be divided into classes according to their ability and comprehension of the language and not necessarily academic ability.

**E P:** Research recommends code switching when a pupil’s home language is not the medium of instruction. How do you feel about that?

**Mrs Gabriel:** Um we had a thing here with the Head of the English Department. Where if one child wants to explain to the other one because they haven’t understood, err it’s far more effective for them to explain to each other in Zulu to grasp the concept. But we’re an exam–orientated education system and in the end, the child has got to express that understanding of the concept in English on paper. Um so, I suppose ideally to try and find a medium between the two. Yes, they can revert to their mother tongue to try and explain a concept, but immediately following that they need to record their understanding in English on paper.

Innumerable inferences may derive from this excerpt of Mrs Gabriel’s interview. It is evident that she does not favour the use of any other language but English in the classroom. Mrs Gabriel is an experienced, committed hard–working teacher who wants the best for her pupils. In addition, culture plays a significant role in the classroom. If it is accepted that culture is shared then it should be accepted that culture is a social phenomenon and its symbolic element is encompassed in the use of language and linguistic connotations. Language is used to help gain understanding and make sense of the world and, as a result, both pupil' and teachers’ perceptions of the world are “mediated through language” (Sonderling, 1998, p.2). Based on Sonderling’s (1998) claim that “language reflects the belief and ideology of a society and a culture”, the potential for miscommunication is high where teachers perceive linguistic diversity as a liability, rather than an asset on which learning may be constructed. Pupils are at a disadvantage when there is a mismatch between their language and that of the teacher and when pupils are:

(S) ubmerged in English without the skills necessary to profit from the instruction they receive …are at risk of joining the ranks of students who tune out their teachers, cut classes and drop out before graduating

(Grossman, 1995, pp. 161-162)

The teachers’ preoccupation with the pupils’ use of the language of instruction may actually work to the pupils’ detriment if these pupils lack the skills to communicate in English. A teacher’s concerns may be shaped by personal factors such as home conditions, the situation as it prevailed previously, her personal predilections, and self-confidence. As a result some teachers may appear to make irrational and unrealistic
claims about their pupils. Mrs Gabriel is accustomed to conditions as they were prior to democracy, and she finds the change to a multilingual environment unsettling specifically when pupils code switch. Code switching can be “a valuable resource” in the classroom when teaching across the curriculum. However, many teachers are unaware of this (Tubbs & Moss 1991 p.110).

In Britain, in the late 1960s, the variety of languages spoken by immigrants was perceived as problematic. Teachers, as well as policy makers, saw language difficulties as being the same as language deficiency and, as a result, non-standard English as well as its users were thought to be less competent (Troyna, 1995). In 1985, the Bullock Report - *A language for life was* produced in response to the issue of English second language usage in the United Kingdom (in Troyna, 1995). This policy sought to recognise linguistic differences of the children of immigrants. The Swann Committee that sanctioned Bullock’s ideas on language across the curriculum, where all secondary school teachers should be responsible for the teaching of English across the curriculum, stated that all teachers are responsible for language irrespective of the subjects that they teach. However, in recent years, considerable research has been conducted in the field of English as a second language (ESL). Many teachers believe that it is the job of the English teacher to teach English and, as a result, they refuse to correct English usage in their particular subjects. The perceptions of a number of teachers in my research with regard to language paralleled those of the British teachers during the 1960s. Mrs Gabriel, Mrs Matthew, Mrs Gunter and Mrs Jacob complained about pupils’ language ability and comprehension. Mrs Naidoo is one of the few teachers who, conversely, saw a challenge in the fact that the education of the various racial groups is unequal, specifically with regard to language.

**EP:** What would you say are the greatest challenges that you have had to face this year?

**Mrs Naidoo:** My greatest challenge was and still is the inequality of education between the races. The Indian children not that much but I found the exposure of the black child, the education that we are exposing them to now is not that good. I don’t know if it is the language barrier, because they learnt English as a second language. And they should be learning English as a second language and now they are in a school, which teaches English as a first language.

Mrs Naidoo expresses grave concern that English is only taught as a first language in historically white schools. Many African pupils from township schools do not have the language skills to cope in a first-language environment. This does not mean that these pupils are cognitively deficient. A number of teachers perceive these pupils as being low achievers and lose sight of the fact that the change from an
English second–language to an English first–language environment could be a contributory factor to numerous academic problems that these pupils experience.

The impact of change is evident since the school expects black pupils to adapt to English first language instruction without any intervention.

There was a different scenario where English as a second language and remedial English were taught for Asians and Afro-Caribbean’s in the UK in the early 1960s, in an attempt to appear to show “goodwill and tolerance” for pupils who were perceived to have language deficiencies.

(Gaine, 1987, p. 22)

Apart from the fact that the pedagogical styles used in ‘township schools’ differ vastly from those used in historically white former Model C schools, “…black education is marked by high teacher–pupil ratios, low teacher qualification, over–crowded conditions, inadequate facilities, shortage of textbooks, high failure rates and insufficient schools” (Carrim, 1995 p. 22). Although it is more than ten years since Carrim’s article was written it is still pertinent today. It was apparent when this study was conducted that many pupils who had come through an historically white primary school were coping considerably better than their counterparts who had come from ‘township schools’. However, there may not be a causal link between the pupils who have come through DET schools and their counterparts from white primary schools since some of the African pupils may have acquired the cultural capital to enable them to match the system. Generally, Indian pupils coped well when they entered historically white schools as the medium of instruction in Indian schools is English first language and the teaching and learning are generally good in the Indian primary schools that they attend. The poor educational system that African pupils have come through cannot be ignored because it impacts gravely on the pupils’ current performance as was evident from the discourse of blame that some teachers engaged in.

It is a common practice for African pupils to use vernacular in the classroom (Meerkotter, 1998 in Morrow & King, 1998, p.36).
Tubbs and Moss (1991) encourage the use of another language, which they refer to as code switching. The shift in codes – that is, switching from one language to another – is a means of negotiating power. In a classroom where English first language is the medium of instruction English second language pupils are “disempowered” to a certain extent because they lack competence in English to engage in discussions in class.

Being able to code switch is a means for these pupils to empower themselves and, in order to negotiate power and be participants in the classroom, the African pupils use the vernacular. Participation entails shifts in power and by pupils using the vernacular they are shifting the power from the teacher and the first language speakers to themselves. “How people position themselves in relation to one another in various systems is referred to as the use of power. This may be described as a power–relation, which people possess” (Nelson & Wright, 1995, p. 8). The use of the vernacular in my opinion, falls into the model of power referred to as “power to” where the metaphor used is that of human development. “Power can grow infinitely if you work at it” (Nelson and Wright, 1995, p. 8).

Teachers do not believe that they should change their mindsets because they believe that pupils from racially diverse backgrounds should adapt to the culture of the school which in fact did not cater for diversity. I observed that African pupils always address their teachers in English but speak to each other in the vernacular. By teachers insisting on the use of English only it may be assumed that they would like pupils to be assimilated into the mainstream by their use of English only. The assimilationist view purports that the indigenous culture of the individual is totally obliterated while he/she becomes absorbed into the dominant culture.

Assimilation is defined as “a weapon for cultural imperialism or the means for a total take over of one group by another” (Giddens, in Todd, 1991, p. 94). Although the word “assimilation” was not mentioned in the interviews it was evident from comments made by teachers that they want pupils from diverse race groups to be assimilated.

This preoccupation with assimilation is evident in a teacher’s casual comment to me about how she deals with African pupils, “I told them (African pupils) that they have chosen to come to our school so they should change to suit our school or leave” (my italics). In her subjective reality it is not necessary for her to change but she believes that pupils should change, in other words be assimilated.
“In blunt terms, assimilation refers to the process of becoming similar”, but Troya (1993, p.23) asserts that this definition needs to be refined when it is applicable to race and ethnic relations. His discourse on assimilation emphasises that there is loss experienced by the assimilated. Assimilation in the United Kingdom involved the suppression and denunciation of cultural and linguistic differences of the ethnic minorities through legislation in the 1960s. The teachers who insist that African pupils only speak English and become assimilated into the dominant culture are as naïve as the policy makers in the UK during the 1960s. Unfortunately, I did not obtain any information on pupils’ perceptions on the use of English only in the classroom.

In a country with eleven official languages it should be acceptable for pupils to converse in the vernacular. In this regard Gurnah (1987) recommends multilingual studies. He believes that this will elevate the importance of languages other than English. Miss John said that she did not mind pupils’ use of the vernacular.

**E P:** I noticed that the black pupils speak in the vernacular. Do you object to the use of the vernacular in the mathematics classroom?

**Miss John:** No I don’t. At one stage, we tried to let them speak in English, only English. If it doesn’t, as long as it is quiet and it’s not disrupting everybody else, then I don’t mind. Because maybe it helps them understand. That’s more important to me than what language they are speaking, doesn’t bother me. As long as they are not referring to me, that’s fine.

Mrs Timothy from Zama believes that she understands the various cultural groups that she teaches but still has problems with pupils using the vernacular.

**E P:** What would you say was the greatest problem that you encountered in the multiracial classroom?

**Mrs Timothy:** Um I understand or I feel I do understand all cultural groups that I teach. Um, but one of the problems that I still have got to try and accept is the way that some pupils insist on speaking their vernacular right through while I am teaching. They are still muttering to one another in their vernacular and I find that sort of puts me off. Um, and I think it is because I don’t understand what they are saying, Or they could be mocking me, or they could be helping each other. Um if, if I have taught a certain aspect they don’t all grasp, I do get the pupils that have understood, their culture to help them in their vernacular. I do encourage it. I think it is healthy but when I am trying to teach and do my job and there is this constant chatter in the background, in a different language I find that very hard to handle.

Teachers believe that, in order to meet the needs of the individual pupils in their classes, it is necessary to change their language usage and, in certain instances, to a lesser extent, their methods.
E P: Did you have to change your teaching methods or your style of teaching when your classroom became racially diverse?

Mrs Gabriel: As far as language, communication is concerned yes. I find that the children whose home language is not English - very definitely. You need to repeat things for them you need to use synonyms, which are much simpler - English vocabulary… And you find if you have a class that’s predominantly African children or non-English speaking first–language children you um, tend to lower your level of English communication.

E P: Apart from the language, problems are there any other aspects that you have had to change with regard to your teaching methodology?

Mrs Gabriel: Erm, I found that, things like group work and erm, those sort of less structured things the children, erm, the black children find it very difficult to cope with. Erm if you give them resource material and get them to work from it erm they still very much [pause] and I [pause] it all comes through their society and their parents and the chalk and talk kind of thing. You must give them and they will give you back. Erm, I haven’t changed my methods but I found a lot of erm resistance to them. For example if they do a diagram in their books and you come to a test or an exam and you give them the same diagram but drawn in a different way they think it’s grossly unfair because they haven’t seen it before erm that sort of thing. They, they wanting a much more direct [pause] and they much more comfortable with much more direct teaching method. The lateral thinking is just not there. Even those who’ve come through Model C Primary schools.

E P: So what do you think is the problem then?

Mrs Gabriel: Erm I think to a large extent erm with their parents and that sort of thing; they still work on a much more direct teaching system. Put the notes on the board, you go home to learn the notes and you answer the questions directly from the notes. In Geography, we do a lot of questions about ‘well how do you think this will influence that?’ ‘What influence will it have on the population of the country’? Their first reaction all the way up to matric is that you didn’t tell us. They, they don’t make deductions for themselves. And, and I’ve, I think even if they’ve been through Model C primary schools the teaching is quite direct. They are not exposed to much media and experiences and things like that. Their experiences are more limited and not [pause] different to (my emphasis) the white children.

Mrs Gabriel’s response to my first question is related to language usage and not methods. It is obvious that she has problems teaching ‘African pupils’ not because they are African, but because her classroom demographics have changed and now accommodating pupils who come from a poor teaching background. Mrs Gabriel is aware of the different pedagogical practices employed by teachers in ex D E T schools as she refers to the ‘direct’ teaching methods that African pupils are accustomed to. She engages in a discourse of blame; of pupil’s backgrounds, parents, and their society. She points out the pupils’ lack of cognitive ability and claims that they are unable to make deductions for themselves. Mrs Gabriel alleges that there is a difference between her white and African pupils. There would obviously be
a difference because the majority of her African pupils have experienced poor teaching and were not prepared for the level at Phakamani. The admission tests are no longer allowed and schools have to admit pupils because of the policy of equity and equality. Although Mrs Gabriel is not being intentionally racist, she is unsuspectingly engaging in a discourse of blame.

Her discourse of blame may be interpreted as “new racism”,

“…which is an articulation of racism which may not be recognised as racism by the person because it is disguised by discourses of patriotism.”

(Troyna, 1995, p.14)

This form of racism was common in the United Kingdom and Troyna (1995, p. 14) refers to Walker’s (in Troyna, 1988, p. 47) ethnography that illustrates “claims of territoriality in the talk of ‘them’ and ‘us’ to be common”. Mrs Gabriel’s use of ‘them and us’ unremittingly in her interview could be interpreted as protection of her territory - the school.

The use of these labels could also be interpreted as another form of racism known as ‘popular racism’ (Gillborn, 1995). Mrs Gabriel’s reference to lowering the level of English communication could indicate that she perceives a lowering of standards. One must not lose sight of the fact that Mrs Gabriel is an extremely competent person and perhaps her reaction could stem from the fact that she is not achieving the results that she achieved previously in an all white school. In addition, she is probably unaware that her attitude could be interpreted as “popular racism”.

A legacy from apartheid and the battle against it are ‘binary opposites’ which can hinder teachers from identifying what they need to do in a multiracial classroom.

The inequitable and segregated education systems of apartheid, where the ‘white’ system was both immensely and continuously advantaged, resulted in far superior resources for whites than for their African counterparts. This has fostered the belief that the ‘white’ system presents a model for education and that anything less than the white system is inferior.

(Morrow, 1996, p. 149)

The psychological state of uncertainty is characterised in this excerpt from the interview with Mrs Gabriel, since she appears to be unaware about whether she has made any difference at all in her pupils’
lives (Fullan 1991, 1993, 2000). Mrs Michael offers a disparate view from Mrs Gabriel’s. Despite having to change her language usage she portrays a positive attitude to her racially diverse classes:

_E P:_ Did you find that you had to change your teaching methods?

_Mrs Michael:_ I have changed my teaching methods to a certain extent, especially as far as terminology goes. Simpler explanation, where it’s not, where English is not the mother tongue of the children and I’ve actually found that has improved all the children’s work because you don’t presuppose that everyone understands what words mean.

_E P:_ So your method has changed with regard to concepts… (Mrs Michael interrupting)

_Mrs Michael:_ Yes! Yes! More explanation, simpler explanations, the content hasn’t changed but just your, the method of teaching it has. A lot more interaction with pupils especially as far as “Do you understand, does it make sense”? And those sort of questions.

_E P:_ Did you change your methods immediately your school admitted other race groups or was it a process?

_Mrs Michael:_ I had an easy way. I started with Bible education. Which was a very strong basis from where I come from. I think it was an easier route than possibly other people have had leading into it. We did, we did have a special group that we started when we first brought in, in children from a purely township situation who were not on the educational level, shall we say of my own colour group (white). And erm we actually started special classes, which was teaching from a different dimension, which was very interesting. And that was, it was almost like, nbm, pre Grade 8 almost Grade 7½. It was a type of bridging class. Though we felt at the time it was a major advantage it didn’t have any long-term benefits. Because we found that the children that we thought you know because they come from that situation were, were being now advantaged with doing an almost slower in–depth sort of course. We found that many of them were far ahead of that and they needed to be promoted to the mainstream almost immediately. There were some children who were battling and are still battling through this system. Because of the language, it is not their medium of, the medium of instruction, is not their home language. And they haven’t had enough of the basic background in that language to cope, That is, that is what makes me very sad because I feel that has not been adequately been, been dealt with.

Like Mrs Gabriel, Mrs Michael’s answer to my question on methods makes reference to language usage. However, the difference in Mrs Michael’s response is that there is evidence of sympathy, and a positive attitude in this excerpt. Her capacity to nurture her pupils is apparent and she neither blames the pupils nor their backgrounds. Her discourse of blame is subtly directed at the previous system of segregated education with all its inequalities. As a key agent for success in teaching, Mrs Michael displays professionalism and shows commitment, competence, sympathy and quality, which Morrow (1996) claims are the necessary components to succeed in the classroom. There is an air of excitement and enthusiasm about everything Mrs Michael says and does and she is one of the few teachers who is
positive about the racially diverse classroom. Mrs Michael has many years of experience behind her and confessed to being opposed to the previous segregated education system. It is evident that Mrs Michael anticipates an all round improvement in education.

All the teachers interviewed complained about the decline in discipline since the advent of black pupils in historically white former Model C schools. Even the teachers who were not interviewed complained constantly in the staffroom during breaks. Many of the teachers complained about the behaviour of the African pupils who had come from D E T schools. According to teachers these pupils were accustomed to an authoritarian teaching style and now, because they are confronted with what teachers would like to believe is a ‘democratic’ or authoritative teaching style, pupils have encountered a ‘mismatch’ and are consequently deviant. This claim is a generalisation as observations identified that there were a large number of white pupils who were arrogant, rude and deviant. Indian pupils were also not blameless, as they misbehaved and caused problems as well.

The problem of discipline could probably be ascribed to the change in environment where pupils from D E T schools and Indian schools find themselves in totally unfamiliar surroundings.

Mrs Naidoo, however, believes that:

Mrs Naidoo: The decline in discipline is because pupils are not taught to behave and, consequently, do not know how to.

E P: What would you say are the greatest challenges that you have had to face this year?

Mrs Naidoo: The second thing is the discipline. I am finding the discipline exceptionally difficult. Err simply because, before you, at least when I was at school, you had the naughty children, you had the mischievous children, but now you have the children who err. It’s not about choosing to be naughty, it is just a way of life. So they know no other way, that’s the way they are and that’s the discipline. I find it exceptionally difficult.

E P: Is this specifically from one race group or all the race groups?

Mrs Naidoo: I’d say all the race groups. To me it seems to be a trend um, simply because that’s it ja. I think it’s also the children wanting to conform.

E P: Can you elaborate please?
Mrs Naidoo: Yes, to conform to each other’s ways, and to want to fit in and to want to belong. So what the one does the other will also do. So I think that also lends to the lack of discipline and I also think that the parents don’t play as crucial a part as they should be playing

Mrs Naidoo identifies two reasons for lack of discipline: pupils wanting to conform to the dominant culture and the lack of parental control. In an attempt to conform, pupils from diverse race groups have to change and, in certain cases, the change gives rise to deviant behaviour. It was difficult to identify the discipline problems in Mrs Naidoo’s classes. I spent twelve periods observing her classes and not once was there a serious discipline problem. Her classes are generally well-controlled and well-behaved.

Parental control was identified as a contributory factor to the lack of discipline. However, the 21st Century has brought with it enormous demands on households, where both parents are compelled to work because of the economic situation in the country. As a result, there is little or no supervision in these homes when children return from school. It could also be argued that perhaps another reason for the bad behaviour is the change in values and lifestyles globally. Television has a great influence on impressionable teenagers and the type of music that these teenagers are exposed to, as well as the films that they watch all have an influence on them. Violence, sex and strong language are found in the lyrics of the songs as well as the films. The children try to emulate their pop and film idols in their daily lives and the result is the lack of discipline that they display in the classroom. Mrs Jacob is of the same opinion as Mrs Naidoo with regard to discipline:

Mrs Jacob: I started teaching well twenty years ago in 1980. I would say I don’t think I had a non-white child in my class. Okay and I would like to say since then now after twenty years have passed almost, it can almost be half, half, not all but some classes are...Um I find that discipline has gone completely and I don’t believe in my heart that it’s actually me. Just believe that some. I don’t know what it is. If it is the different cultures all trying to impress each other or if they are trying to out do one another to see who is going to be the leader of the group. That is how I find it with the different colours in the class.

E P: So you believe that the discipline has deteriorated and that you are not sure what it is?

Mrs Jacob: No I am not sure what it is but I have a feeling it could be, I feel it could be something to do with the colour change in the class, something. Maybe the cultures are different, or you see I don’t know how Indian children, African children and white are differently brought up. So therefore I feel it is like how else can I say?

Mrs Jacob concludes that the lack of discipline could be as a result of the racial integration and the pupils’ rearing. Mrs Jacob’s reference to the manner in which pupils from diverse cultures are reared indicates that she sees difference as does Mrs Gabriel, but both these teachers’ comments advance the idea of
difference as negative. It is imperative that differences and commonalities that exist within the schools are discussed but, unless means are identified to make the instructional connections with those differences and commonalities, teaching will not succeed.

Mrs Gunter does not appear to have a good rapport with the pupils. She is adamant that it is not necessary to change teaching methods and language but she complains about pupils’ language ability. Below is an excerpt from my field notes of a lesson that I observed in Mrs Gunter’s class.

This is generally a badly behaved class; however, a few pupils appear to be paying attention to Mrs Gunter while the majority of the pupils are playing around. Andre and Carl, in the last two desks on the left, play a game where they keep spinning coins. I cannot master the rules of the game as my attention is drawn to Lerato, Thebo, Nandi and Busi who are talking in vernacular and laughing raucously. When Mrs Gunter asks a question pupils just shout out the answer and giggle uncontrollably. The majority of the pupils are ‘doing their own thing’. The noise is unbearable I really don’t know how Mrs Gunter can continue with the lesson with all the shouting and laughing. Tamsyn and Claire in the first row on the right are fooling around hitting each other and giggling hysterically. Chaos reigns supreme! Mrs Gunter calls out “Excuse me Thabo why is your butt not on the seat? To which Ashley replies “He does not have one”. The entire class erupts into gales of laughter. It is obvious that Mrs Gunter has very little control over this class. The way the lesson started out I was convinced that this was going to be a very well behaved class but the opposite is true. I pray for the siren to sound as I cannot take much more of this. At last the wail of the siren and I have a few minutes of respite before the next onslaught.

(Field notes, 17/08/2000)

Mrs Gunter obviously experiences a sense of false clarity as she believes that she has no problems (Fullan, 2000). A woman who trained in Germany and was accustomed to very strict discipline labours under the misconception that she has control over the class. Mrs Gunther has also been teaching for over twenty years and has extensive experience in her subject. Despite all this it is evident that her classroom management is sadly lacking.

6.3 “…the discipline killed me”

The majority of African pupils are in the lower academic range of the Grade 8 classes, that is, 8E to 8 J, depending on the number of Grade 8 classes in each of the three schools. I made a point of observing most of these classes because of their racially mixed nature. The classes at the top of the alphabet have predominantly white pupils. The pupils’ behaviour in these classes that I observed was disruptive, giving teachers reason to complain continuously. The complaints levelled against the disruptive learners may be
perceived as discriminatory as they disciplined and reprimanded the African learners. Teachers spent time reprimanding, disciplining and punishing while the rest of the class waited for the lesson to begin. Although there were some white pupils who were troublemakers the majority of the disruptive pupils, in the teachers’ opinion, were the African pupils.

Gillborn (1995) refers to ‘disciplinary conflict’ between white teachers and Afro-Caribbean pupils and he believes that teachers perceive these pupils as a disciplinary challenge. This perception results in greater control and criticism of these pupils. This could be the reason for the teachers adopting strict disciplinary measures. However, despite teachers attempting to enforce strict disciplinary measures, pupils still misbehaved. Interviews with some pupils confirmed that there were those pupils who behaved badly in class and, as a result, the entire class suffered. At this point I present a slight asymmetry, by introducing pupils’ perceptions of behaviour. African pupils’ behaviour came under attack not only from teachers but also from pupils. As an example, consider the following extract from my interview with Tarryn, from Phakamani, a high–achiever and a top pupil in her grade.

**E P:** Did you have any objections to pupils from other race groups entering your school?

**Tarryn:** Yes at first I did because um, well where I come from … I had [pause] went to another school, there were like these African guys in our class. They disrupt and it wastes learning time and everything so at first ja, I was quite like irritated with them but then after a while you now, you learn to live with it.

**E P:** When you say you ‘learn to live with it’, are you just resigning yourself to the fact that you have African people in your class?

**Tarryn:** um with some people JA, I have just resigned myself because some of them as well as other people are from other races. They’re also very, you know, disruptive but with other, other people, I have also made quite good friends with other people, races, from other races. So um, some of them I’ve accepted them as people. They’re the same as us.

Tarryn is a conscientious pupil who objects to the time being wasted when teachers have to discipline pupils. This was evident during my observations when Tarryn lost patience with disruptive pupils in her class. She sat glaring at pupils with a look of exasperation. Lesego, also from Phakamani, concurs with Tarryn and spoke about the good discipline that the principal insists upon, but pupils are terribly ill-disciplined in his opinion, despite the principal’s threats and reprimands.

**E P:** What can you tell me about the behaviour of your classmates?
Themba: Err my classmates… they are okay but sometimes they can get rowdy in class and we always get detention for people that misbehave and err detention for people that talk in class and stuff like that

E P: Do you only get detained because pupils misbehave or are there any other reasons?

Themba: Yes. Sometimes Hope, he works and sometimes he is just off. And then he misbehaves and he is just totally out of hand. And then um, Katelyn and a whole group of girls they all um they all, talk and Mr Abraham, he shouts at them and in Maths the same happens and our teacher shouts at them.

Themba confirms that pupils are noisy and disruptive and the bad behaviour offends teachers. Tshepo from Esiphumekelayo also believes that there are a number of deviant pupils in his class but he maintains that the entire class is unfairly punished because of a few deviants.

E P: How does your homeroom teacher deal with the problematic pupils in your class?

Tshepo: Mrs Visser, err… not to say that she is a bad teacher or anything like that but um she is not that strong. I mean the only thing she knows is to give the whole class detention, she doesn’t deal with individuals you see and I tried to help her and she says I am back chatting and telling her what to do. But I am only trying to help her because it doesn’t help if she keeps on punishing the whole group and doesn’t deal with individuals.

E P: What do these individuals do to get the entire class into trouble?

Tshepo: Abdullah always misbehaves. Hope is another problem and interferes with pupils who want to work. Nicole is always talking. There is Mandy who always likes to talk when the teacher is talking. Then Sizwe and some boys that I am not too sure about, they also talk a lot.

Themba claims that teachers do not punish the culprits but unfairly punish the entire class and Bongani agrees that teachers do not identify those who misbehave, and punish innocent pupils. Both Themba and Bongani believe that Mrs Visser over-reacts when pupils talk. I have observed this class during a number of lessons with Mrs Visser. The class is generally unruly and rude and Mrs Visser does not lose her temper without reason:

Mrs Visser asks Zenele to answer a question. He blurts out something, which is obviously incorrect, just for the sake of answering. Zaida turns around and teases him and they both burst out laughing raucously about the answer that he has given. They then continue to play with each other while Mrs Visser at this point looks absolutely distraught. While Mrs Visser continues questioning those pupils who are paying attention to the lesson about the work that has been projected on the OHP the other pupils keep on talking and making funny sounds and pull faces behind Mrs Visser’s back. When she again reminds them to do something about the noise. Caitlin shouts out ‘Ah shut up!’ in an attempt to quieten the class down of course to no avail. By now Mrs Visser is showing signs of stress and takes Ryan out of the classroom and reprimands him. The class is unaffected by this and continue the bad behaviour. As Mrs Visser and Ryan return to class the siren sounds.
There are shrieks of ‘Yeah! Cool!’ as Grade 8 G hurry out of the classroom. Mrs Visser heaves a sigh of relief and tells me she just does not know how much more of this she can take.

(Field notes 16/08/2000)

Pindiwe from Esiphumelelayo also refers to the disruptive behaviour of her classmates:

_E P:_ Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your class?

**Pindiwe:** …Well probably if Mr Christian and the teachers could like you know, attend to really serious issues in the school.

_E P:_ Like what?

**Pindiwe:** Because the other time I mean like our class, I, I mean [pause] feel that our class is not being taken seriously and taken into consideration because some of us really work very hard and then, and then there are others who just really do not care. And then um we have addressed this to the teachers and if they had done something to stop bad behaviour but then Mr Christian also has not attended to the situation. I think that small things should be taken seriously because they can end up in big ways and stuff like that in our class should be taken into consideration. That’s what I think.

Pindiwe believes that ‘serious issues are not being addressed’. She points out that there are some pupils who sincerely want to work and there are those who are just not interested. Like the pupils who I referred to earlier Pindiwe believes that teachers are not identifying the trouble-makers. Teachers try to discipline the entire class when there are only a few who are guilty of ill-discipline. Pindiwe firmly believes that management should play a more visible role in controlling discipline. Generally the pupils who are serious and committed to learning are those who complained about other pupils who are disruptive. However, those ill-disciplined pupils who cause all the trouble in the classes are those who complained about teachers.

Mr Mark claims that the “the noise levels…seem to have gone through the roof”. Noise levels had, according to many teachers, risen drastically since the admission of pupils of other cultures. Black pupils were blamed for the increase in noise levels. Zama teachers in particular found noise levels impossible to cope with:

_E P:_ Could you tell me what you found to be one of the greatest challenges in the multiracial classroom?

**Mr Mark:** Specifically the noise level, which seemed to have gone through the roof. There is a perception that African children are noisy. Certainly at that stage it was obvious that that the African children were noisier. Whether that was because of their cultural background because of the schools they came from …I’m
Mrs Timothy, also from Zama, concurs with Mr Mark:

**E P:** Have you also found noise to be a problem?

**Mrs Timothy:** Ja, the noise level is tremendous; some don’t know what speaking quietly means, everything has to be shouted and screamed at the top of their voices.

**E P:** Can you just err, can you identify the groups?

**Mrs Timothy:** It is the black groups. [Pause] Again, I think it is a cultural thing um, because in their culture it, it is not acceptable if you whisper, or if you talk quietly. Um, you know it’s a belief that you are talking behind somebody’s back so they are automatically loud, but sometimes I also get the impression that these black pupils deliberately um, go beyond the acceptable noise level, just to be otherwise.

Mrs Timothy, despite her experience in a multicultural environment during her school years, has difficulty dealing with the noise levels and lapses into a discourse of blame against the pupils’ culture for the fact that they speak loudly. An inference that could be made from Mrs Timothy’s use of the words “them, their, they” as well as the accusatory tone she uses is that she is racially insensitive. However, it would be unfair to make such an inference. Mrs Timothy’s attitude could be interpreted as ‘new racism’ (Troyina, 1993) or ‘popular racism’ (Gillborn, 1995). Once again it would be unfair to describe Mrs Timothy in this way as she was merely stating her experiences. If she had couched her comments in subtler terms perhaps it may not been likened to “new” or “popular” racism. Mrs Timothy from Zama, who has many years of experience behind her, is faced with a situation that was unfamiliar to her. As a member of staff who taught prior to diversity in schools, she still believes that she should be in a position to control these racially diverse classrooms in the same way that she controlled her white classrooms, because of her experience of racial diversity. She also believes that pupils are not changing to suit the requirements of the school and conforming to the norms.

It was difficult for the teachers at Zama to accept the noise levels that had risen because they had been used to a quieter environment when Zama was a single-race school and now that it had changed, with the influx of African pupils, they find the noise levels intolerable. At Esiphumelelayo, Mrs Jacob complained about the noise.

**E P:** What other problems have you encountered?
Mrs Jacob: …My biggest problem is the noise level in the class. And I feel it is solely because of the um, the African children that always have to talk loud. I mean sometimes they are actually sitting right next to each other, doing beautiful work but shouting, that throws me, because I would like it to be more quiet. That throws me.

Mrs Gabriel from Phakamani also found the noise to be a problem.

E P: What was one of the greatest problems that you encountered or one of the greatest challenges that you faced?

Mrs Gabriel: Getting used to the noise level. Phew! Phew! But I don’t think that [pause] I think what has happened is that the cultural change and the whole change in education has happened at the same time. When we were a TED school, just-for-white [pause] school, we were very regimented by the TED. You had to do this, you had to change periods at a certain time, and you had to do this. And so you were inspected and checked on these things. Now as those have become less rigid, and the school is allowed to adapt, but at the same time, we were changing culture. So whether things like the noise levels between the change of periods is as a result of cultural integration, where the African children tend to talk much louder erm and then are quite happy to shout at each other from one end of the corridor to the other. They just don’t think before they do it, it’s just okay. Whether it’s because of that or whether it’s because erm we don’t expect the children to march in straight lines up and down stairs as we used to in a much more regimented education system. But I think it’s a combination of both. So one can’t, it’s difficult to say what the changes are.

The increased noise levels affected both Mrs Jacob and Mrs Gabriel. Mrs Jacob, on the one hand, engages in a discourse of blame and explicitly blames the black pupils for the increased noise levels. She may also be displaying “new racism” while being unaware of it (Verma et al, 1994; Troya, 1993). On the other hand, Mrs Gabriel also admits to experiencing problems with the increased noise levels at Phakamani but she identifies factors that she believes could have contributed to this problem of noise and cites “change” as one of them. She, like the other teachers, appears to be in a state of ‘painful unclarity’ (Fullan, 2000).

Although the discourse of blame was directed more at African pupils there were also white and Indian pupils who were ill-disciplined. There was a white girl at Phakamani whom I secretly named ‘Ms Obnoxious’ because of her persistently obnoxious behaviour. She was noisy, arrogant, fought with the African pupils and called them names. She was sent out of every class every day and was proud of the fact that she had amassed the greatest number of demerits in the school. Apparently, she said that she enjoyed receiving demerits because she did not like school. In every class that she attended she made a nuisance of herself. According to the Class Captain she intentionally misbehaved. Later, when talking to her class teacher I was told that this child had serious domestic problems; her deviance was an attempt to attract attention. Although it is not the type of change that I have been referring to throughout this thesis,
perhaps the change from the home environment for this girl prompted her to behave the way she did because the only attention she received was at school, albeit negative.

The pupils at Zama were just as ill-disciplined as pupils from Phakamani and Esiphumelelayo. They were noisy and very rude to Mr Zwane, the very teacher who claimed that pupils respect him because they “know my qualifications”. The pupils totally disregarded his presence and walked in and out of the classroom as they pleased. The noise levels in all Mr Zwane’s classes were deafening. Pupils showed little respect for Mr Zwane and argued with him. They paid little or no attention to his lessons and played about or did their homework for other subjects in his class. Mr Zwane was a novice teacher who because he had attended an historically white university expected pupils to look up to him. He was the only African teacher at Zama and was under the misconception that he was held in high esteem by all. He also believed that because he was employed in a former Model C school he had an advantage over other African teachers.

Blumenfield–Jones (1996, pp. 227 -228) cites his study of three cultural models which may assist with the understanding of why teachers behave in certain ways. This is possible because cultural models inquiry does not “romanticise” the teacher nor does it make the teacher a robot of the state as other forms of teacher analysis do. He also emphasises the need for the researcher to bear culture in mind to develop an enhanced sense of the origins of thought, instead of just demonstrating how descriptions may be communicated. Perhaps Mr Zwane and Mr Khumalo’s behaviour in the classroom may be analysed in accordance with these models.
Mr Zwane, however, did not appear to be bothered by the noise. Observations highlighted his inability to control the class. When a pupil asked for assistance, Mr Zwane spent a lengthy period trying to solve the pupil’s problem while the rest of the class was noisy and behaved badly. Mr Zwane has encountered change in the ethos of the school and his incapacity to cope with this change is evident in the manner in which he deals with problems in his classroom. He is definitely experiencing painful un-clarity (Fullan 2000) because he firmly believes that he has adapted to the change and is coping with it, whereas observations emphasise the lack of control.

At Phakamani, Mr Khumalo also had no control over the biology classes that I observed. Below is an excerpt from my observation of his Biology lesson:

It is 12:20, 12 August time for Biology with Mr Khumalo who is the only teacher of colour on the staff of Phakamani. Pandemonium reigns supreme. It is obvious that this is going to be a painful experience for me. There is a complete transformation in the African pupils. Even those African pupils who were well behaved in other classes are loud and badly behaved.

The lesson begins, it is a revision lesson. The noise levels rise steadily to deafening proportions. There is far more interaction between Mr Khumalo and the African pupils than there was with any of the other teachers. Pupils are more relaxed in his class and speak to him freely in the vernacular and respond to his questions in both the vernacular and English. Neither the white pupils nor the Indian pupils contribute to the lesson.

A group of pupils Mthu, Zakele, Mfundo, Thulani and Vuyo are rude to Mr Khumalo and giggle continuously, as the noise levels raise Mr Khumalo shouts at them to be quiet, they just laugh and retaliate in the vernacular. These are the same pupils who did not make a sound in the Afrikaans and Maths classes. None of the other pupils pay attention to the lesson. Ralph keeps raising his hand to answer when Mrs Khumalo asks a question, but before he can answer the above mentioned groups of pupils shout out the answer.

It is obvious that Mr Khumalo has no control over this class; the notorious group dominates the lesson by screaming out answers and laughing hysterically. Joshua, Gareth Godfrey and a few of their friends sigh and appear to be totally bored while their classmates are having a ball in this lesson. Mfundo displays his worst behaviour, constantly commenting in both English and vernacular. (I am absolutely amazed at this transformation; these pupils who were so meek and mild are now little tyrants, causing absolute chaos in this class).

Vikisha, Sharita, Hemma, Sushila and Amrita sit quietly at the back of the classroom but this is the case in all the classes. They do not comment, do not make a sound. In fact, I have not heard their voices at all in the time that I have spent with them.
Mr Khumalo has returned to his desk and sits at his desk in a very relaxed manner, conversing with a few pupils in the vernacular. These pupils lounge around in their chairs and are extremely disorderly and out of control.

(Field notes 12/08/1999)

Painful un–clarity appropriately describes Mr Khumalo’s state of mind. From the extract it is obvious that Mr Khumalo is failing to achieve the results that he hopes to. Mr Khumalo believes that he is highly successful according to his interview (see appendix F). However, his classroom interaction is focused on pupils from his own ethnic group. He does not include the other pupils who sit passively at the back of the classroom. Where his white counterparts blamed and criticised the black pupils, Mr Khumalo criticised the white pupils, calling them racist. It is apparent that Mr Khumalo’s dissatisfaction with the ethos of the school spills over into the classroom. He is disgruntled because he was not informed about promotion posts and this is apparent in his discourse of blame levelled at his colleagues and the school management. Mr Khumalo does not concede that his experience at this school has contributed to his development.

6.4 Summary

Teachers perceived the impact of change on their ability to function in a new environment. The school population has changed. This change has brought with it many issues that teachers believe they have to contend with. Many of these issues in the teachers’ opinion may be traced back to the admission of black pupils. From interviews and observations it is apparent that teachers are in the unenviable position of attempting to come to terms with the changes that they have encountered in their schools with regard to language and discipline. Several teachers believe that they are not managing their classrooms successfully because they have to change their language usage. According to the majority of the teachers discipline has deteriorated and the noise levels have risen causing extreme frustration. Suggestions by the teachers to explain the reasons for the problems that they were experiencing placed these problems with the pupils. There is a wide range of reasons for the problems that teachers are experiencing but it is far easier to engage in a discourse of blame rather than get to the root of the problems. All questions posed by me to the teachers were phrased in an open–ended manner and at no time were questions asked specifically about black pupils. Just the same, teachers found it appropriate to constantly mention the black pupils, their lack of language skills, and their poor behaviour. It is apparent that African pupils were not treated as individuals in quite the same manner as white pupils were but were identified as a group. Preconceived
thoughts about African pupils’ behaviour and the reasons for this behaviour were held by the majority of the teachers.