Chapter Nine:

RACISM AND SOCIAL INTERACTION AS A CONSEQUENCE OF CHANGE

“A paradox confronts anyone who tries to understand race and racism”.
(Troyna, 1993, p. 92)

9.1 Introduction

“Racism is a difficult issue to research,” argues Rizvi (in Troyna, 1993, p. 15). I reiterate here that the intention of this study was not to investigate racism. However, the issue of racism emerged so often in the interviews that it was impossible to ignore. My intention in this chapter was not to investigate racism per se. I merely present the findings of this research, which raise a number of important but complex issues for those who have an interest in investigating racism in education.

In order to do justice to the rich data that I collected and to distinguish between the subtle differences between the dynamics of racially diverse classrooms and perceived racism, I have decided to present the issues dealt with in this chapter separately, although they are closely related to those in the previous chapter. Change in the demographics in the school is still prevalent and has given rise to a number of problems such as perceived racism, name-calling and a lack of social interaction in certain instances.

I begin by mapping out the different ways in which pupils’ perceive racism in their schools, as they point out incidents that they perceive to be racist. A problem that pupils complained about was name-calling, which caused grave clashes between pupils in the schools where this study was conducted. In Britain it was found that name-calling was common and the cause of much conflict (Verma, Zec & Skinner, 1994; Troyna, 1993; Gillborn, 1991; Foster, 1990). Name-calling is frequently heard in the three schools that I visited. South Africa is no different from Britain in terms of name-calling and many pupils related instances where they were called names. Inter-racial mixing from both teachers’ and pupils’ perspectives is given attention in this chapter. Many of the African and Indian pupils who were interviewed perceived racism as one of the key factors giving rise to problems in the school.
9.2 “It is wrong to pick on people because of their race”

Both black and white pupils have to contend with change in historically white former Model C schools although teachers consider that they (teachers) alone have to contend with the process of change. Fullan (2000) argues that children are also people and adds that educational change and most education will fail unless pupils also have a meaningful part in the endeavour.

Most of the pupils interviewed in the schools had experienced or perceived racism from pupils and teachers, at some time during the year. In certain cases pupils claimed that racism was overt, whereas others claimed it as covert. In the following discussions, pupils talk about their experiences of racism or perceived racism at their schools. Tarryn, from Phakamani, talks about the racism in the current classroom situation:

**EP:** You mentioned racism in the class. Is it from both black and white pupils?

**Tarryn:** JA, I think some of the people in our class are still trying to adapt to the fact that erm that you know if you’re a certain race, they can’t have things the way they want it. You know it has, there’s always going to be something affecting it from the other races. You know what I mean. Uhm, so ja there is but…

**EP:** Can you go into more detail please?

**Tarryn:** Uhm, well with, remember with apartheid? Well I think some people are still affected by that and they still ridicule all white people, but then also white people look on black people as scum in our class. They like, they, they regard, regard them as a lower life form or so, and then they’ll mock them…

**EP:** Have you ever encountered any serious racism

**Tarryn:** Well actually very recently, it wasn’t between myself and somebody. It was between a group of black girls and some white boys, and they were swearing at each other and they were fighting over the Government and why there’s all this crime. “Because of you black people” and they were calling – the black people were calling the white boys ‘white kaffirs’. Ja there was a big ‘barney’. Like major fight.

**EP:** And do you think this affects the school in any way?

**Tarryn:** Ja, because if you can’t co–operate with each other then obviously you’re going to well, if it’s like in class then you won’t. There will always be some disruption

“Racial prejudice is always present in schools where there is cultural/racial diversity. Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) argue that prejudice may be described as favourable or unfavourable emotions, attitudes and beliefs, which are based on a lack of prior knowledge, understanding and reason. These researchers
point out that prejudice is irrational and there is no evidence to support the conflicting views. Every individual acquires a number of prejudices as a result of socialisation within the family, school and community. In the three research schools the type of prejudice that the pupils display are prejudices that they carry to school from their homes. Prejudice is a consequence of learned behaviour and attitudes. If these attitudes and behaviour are ingrained the individual is likely to be averse to change (Van Scotter et al, 1985; Troyna, 1993; Garcia, 1991).

Deshni claims that white pupils are racist, “They don’t like black children and they treat you funny”. When asked to elaborate she was not unable to, nor was she able to provide evidence of this prejudice that she mentioned. She believed that the ‘sports activity week’ that her school had organised could prevent racism. This is a very naïve view on the part of the learner because, as Troyna (1993, p. 157) points out, the recognition of ‘saris, samosas and steel bands’ cannot eradicate the prejudices held by the white majority in Britain. Nor can it suffice as knowledge about other cultures. Likewise, in South African schools, the knowledge of other cultures, their cultural emblems, meals and festivals will in no way rid people of prejudice. The so-called “cultural events” held at historically white schools are strongly criticised by Carrim (1995, p. 22), as he believes that they “reinforce stereotypes”. In these activities, he claims, the diverse ethnic backgrounds of the pupils are “caricatured as well as stereotyped”. One of the undesirable outcomes of these so called “cultural events is a negative presentation of individual groups as different and to some extent as inferior a possible justification for these poor multicultural practices in South Africa is that of the legacy of apartheid. Segregation of the strictest kind kept the different races isolated and when schools opened to all races this was the first opportunity for people of diverse origins to interact. A stereotypical understanding of individuals is the only knowledge that the one group has of the other (Carrim, 1995). Racism is an age-old phenomenon, which seems almost impossible to eradicate and, although schools have become racially diverse, as a result of change in the legislation of the country, racism still exists in and out of schools but in most cases is covert.

Black (generic) pupils in the three schools perceived racism in the way their white classmates treated them, and were adamant that racism featured prominently in their schools. In a study of this nature it is impossible to identify racism during observations, but discussions with both teachers and pupils raised numerous occasions on which incidents, whether perceived as or truly racist, were mentioned.
In this regard, Garcia refers to racism as

…the attitude that one racial group is superior to another. Racist attitudes reflect the prevailing norms of a racial in–group towards a racial out–group. When racist attitudes are carried out into behaviours, they result in expressions of ridicule and hate, in acts of exclusion and discrimination…

(Garcia, 1991, p. 6)

Garcia believes that it could be argued that biological racism is outdated where the idea exists that one race is genetically superior to another. However, this is not the case in South Africa. What black and Indian pupils described during interviews appears to be closely allied to biological racism.

Tshepo and Lesego from Phakamani claimed that they had experienced racism in their school:

**E P:** How do you solve any problems that you have with your white classmates?

**Tshepo:** Some of us prefer to fight with those people; some of us prefer to tell the teacher.

**E P:** Which would you prefer to do?

**Tshepo:** Tell the teacher.

**E P:** And if you tell the teacher, what do you expect the teacher to do?

**Tshepo:** Supposed to take that person to the principal and let him get a, receive a lot of demerits.

Perhaps one of the discourses here that requires attention is that which underpins racism in the classroom. What was really at issue with Tshepo is the fact that he is unable to decide how to respond to racism. He is not sure whether he should retaliate or whether he should complain to the teacher. Earlier in the interview he said that he believed ‘two wrongs make a right’ because he believes that is the only way to deal with problems of racism but, in the above extract, he changes his ideas. Many children like Tshepo are faced with this dilemma of whether to complain or fight back. For example, Lesego states that he has never had problems with Indian pupils, but that the white pupils tease both the African and the Indian pupils. He also points out when blacks have a problem with white pupils they avoid telling the teachers because “some of the teachers…they don’t listen to us”. Some minority pupils complained about teacher indifference in the UK, when they complained about being harassed by white pupils. Others complained about teachers ignoring their problems, and yet others pointed out that there was not a strong enough discipline structure in place to deal with racial abuse (Verma, Zec and Skinner, 1994; Troyna, 1995;
By teachers not taking pupils’ complaints into consideration here in South Africa it could be for one of the three reasons mentioned above; alternatively, it could be the teachers’ reluctance to get involved. It should be borne in mind that teachers are also trying to come to terms with the changes that have taken place in their schools and should not be blamed for the manner in which they handle contentious issues.

All the pupils interviewed at Esiphumelelayo confirmed that there was racial conflict in the school. There was considerable perceived racism on the part of the pupils and many pupils related incidents that they had experienced and believed to be racist.

Zaida complained about a teacher’s misinterpretation of her manner of speaking. The teacher apparently thought she was being rude and she believes that she was not being rude because that was her manner of speaking. Although she is not intentionally aggressive, her manner of speech tends to be perceived as aggressive and is most likely to evoke anger in other pupils as well as teachers. Zaida perceives Mrs Visser’s interpretation of her manner of speech as racist. Some pupils perceive teachers as racist even if they are not and, in Mrs Visser’s case, all that occurred was a complaint about Zaida’s aggression. Another example of what Zaida perceives as racist is the choice of prefect nominees, because an Indian boy was refused prefect nomination on the grounds of not participating in sport, whereas a white boy was accepted even though he did not participate in any sport either. I did not investigate the criteria for the choice of prefect nominees but I was informed by one of the teachers that participation in a sports code was one of the criteria for prefect nomination.

Zaida was not the only learner who brought up the choice of prefect nominees as a racist issue. Several African pupils also criticised the prefect nomination system and, consequently, labelled it as racist. The change that Zaida encountered when she came to Esiphumelelayo from an ‘Indian’ school was overwhelming. Her aggression could be interpreted as a defence mechanism to cope with the change in the environment. Although pupils like Zaida perceive racism, specifically from white teachers and white pupils, there are pupils like Sandra who relates her unhappy experiences as a result of the suspicion with which she is treated because she has black and Indian friends:

**E P:** How do you relate to pupils from other race groups?
Heather: Very well, like when going to the mall and seeing them at the mall. I’ve uhmm one time I saw a friend of mine from class, Mohammed, I saw him at the mall. We are very good friends so I spoke to him and I see like uhmm, lots of black matric guys who I’m friends with as well. And also, Standard 9s, Indians and I go and talk to them. I’m not scared, I’m not scared how people look at me ‘cause I mean they are my friends and frankly I don’t care ‘cause they are just like any other person.

E P: What else can you tell me about your experiences thus far at this school?

Heather: Well because I’m friends with Standard nine and Matric black guys everyone’s treating me differently. They like looking at me strange and stuff. I don’t care. They’re really nice to me, they treat me really well. They actually treat me better than some of the white people I know. There’s this guy in Standard nine. He’s a prefect nominee. His name is Kabala; he is so sweet, he is such a nice guy. I met him at Club 64 and we are very good friends ever since.

E P: So you have noticed that white people treat you differently because you have…

Heather: (interrupting) Ja, because I have Indian and black friends. What’s wrong with that? I really don’t understand (pointing to her head). Whako! You’ve gotta be friends with everyone. It works much better that way.

Heather is ostracised by white pupils because she has Indian and African friends. This is one learner who is prepared to embrace change and befriend pupils from other race groups, despite the cost.

“There is a lot of racism in the school, I think”. Glynnis from Esiphumelelayo was one of the few pupils who mentioned the word “racism” in her interview. Themba claimed that he had encountered a few incidents that he perceived as racist, although he feels that they might not have been intended as such:

E. P: Could you share your experiences of being in a multiracial school?

Themba: Right – experiences in a multiracial school hmm. Some things are difficult and some things are fine. Err you get treated in different ways in different classes or wherever you go, but overall I would say it’s okay.

E P: When you say some things are different and some things are fine, what do you mean?

Themba: Well, uhmm, you can see by the actions of the teachers that some of them do treat you differently, and in a way, some black children are treated better than the white children, or the white children are treated better than the black children. Uhmm and also in my class there is a bit of a problem with uhmm identifying problems in the class and normally I would say the black people get the rack more than the white people do.

E P: Why do you think that is?
Themba: I feel that is... I don’t have a clue that is because uhm, maybe the teacher doesn’t recognise all those white people are talking, maybe she blocks them out or maybe it’s just purely by mistake. But I shouldn’t think so.

EP: So how do you interpret this?

Themba: Perhaps a few racist... maybe a few racist instances, but they not they haven’t been that serious, maybe they have been a few jokes or whatever, but there have been a bit of racism.

EP: Could you give me a few examples, please?

Themba: Uhm, I would say in Mr Peters’ classroom, we do get the black girls moved around a lot because he feels that they talk a lot, he feels that they want to be American as well. Uhm, then you’ve got I mean like when somebody climbed out the classroom window because the teacher wouldn’t let them go. It happened to be an ‘Indian’ boy, Uhm the teacher wouldn’t let you go and he had to go home, but he didn’t get so much of the ruck, but that is another little racist incident.

EP: Why didn’t he get into trouble?

Themba: Well he did, he did get into trouble but not as much for climbing out of the classroom window, which I find very odd. When someone climbs out of the classroom window then you surely going to get into a lot of trouble!

It appears that Themba’s principle intention in this extract is to demonstrate what he perceives as covert racism. Within the discursive field, which constitutes racism to Themba as unacceptable, the teachers’ actions and words have overstepped the boundary into what may be perceived as racist.

Lerato perceived racism in the way in which teachers treat pupils. He firmly believes that in his class “the black pupils get into trouble more than the white pupils”. He points out that racism is evident in the selection of sports teams. He says that the soccer team is representative of the school population, but other codes like water polo and cricket are predominantly white: “I only know one black person who does water polo”.

Sizwe perceives racism in the way teachers talk to black pupils and in comments that teachers make, as well as in the specific words that teachers use. Although unaware of his claims, Sizwe identified what Gillborn (1990, p. 94) refers to as “institutional racism”, because he believes “they don’t choose enough black prefects”. Sizwe feels that there is no point in black pupils aspiring to be prefects because there are so few black prefect nominees accepted:

EP: How do you feel about the prefect nominees?
Sizwe: I do not think there is a fair representation. I mean if you look at the matrics...they don't choose enough black prefects. So it all goes down to the Standard six. I mean as Standard six we are supposed to look up to black prefects. And there are not even enough of them, So we think it's not worth it you know, why even bother trying it's like only a few try and like you got Zenele and got Thulani, you got you know a whole lot of them trying to change the whole system. The system is like so powerful, you can't even work against it.

Gillborn (1990 p 94) argues that the concept of institutional racism is very significant because it establishes a simple yet distressing fact that ‘a rule which is applied to everyone is not automatically fair or just’. Sizwe’s reference to the system being powerful may be interpreted as meaning that black (generic) pupils are powerless to make any obvious changes to the system. Thus, they are subjected to the institutional racism that apparently does not allow for equity. Power has emerged yet again in pupils’ interviews, where the dominant group is regarded as powerful.

Certain teachers are perceived as racist according to Vusi. He claims that “some teachers get on my nerves” and points out that “it is wrong to pick on people because of their race”. He claims to have witnessed racism in some classes. He named a particular teacher who invariably picked on black and Indian pupils. Apparently, this teacher only blames the African and Indian pupils for talking in class, even if white pupils initiated the conversations. Vusi recalls an incident in one of his classes, which he initially perceived as a joke:

E P: So what else can you tell me about your interaction with your teachers: you said you would like to change some of them?

Vusi: ...Oh ja Mr Peters he was joking ...Uhm it was, he was joking around with us. We weren't doing any work because uhm, the syllabus was finished. It was in the second term or first term, right. He told Themba uhm because Themba sits next to Kerry. “Do you want to kiss Kerry?” So Themba says “Don't make your dreams my dreams”. And he said that Themba was blushing. So now, Mr Peters says. Do you want to see how black people blush? And then he took a red overhead thing, err, err koki and he marked Themba’s cheeks out.

E P: So how did you see that?

Vusi: I thought that he was joking around, but then, I saw I saw it he was being a bit racist, speaking like that.

E P: How did the other children in your class see this incident?

Vusi: They just laughed at it; they thought it was a joke... I didn’t think it was racist at the time, but only after that, I thought that it was racist; but then I just didn't bring it up.
Mr Peters is a jovial person as I observed and has a friendly and outgoing disposition and generally appears to have a good rapport with his pupils. Perhaps, what Mr Peters intended to be a joke was perceived and misinterpreted as racist. During observations, there was constant banter between Mr Peters and his pupils. He probably felt that he knew his pupils well enough to carry out the ‘koki incident’ and believed that it would be taken in the spirit in which he intended it, and not misinterpreted as racist. A number of other black pupils also mentioned this incident to me and claimed that they had also perceived Themba’s red cheeks as a joke initially but, had in retrospect, decided that it was a racist incident. From the tone of the incident it appears as if it was a joke, which the pupils subsequently misinterpreted as a racist incident.

As some teachers mentioned in the previous chapter they had to be very careful about what they said and did in class, for fear of being labelled “racist”. Themba also accused Mr Peters of being racist in his selection of the soccer team, because he invariably selected white boys in preference to black (generic) boys. According to Mr Peters, the criteria for selection for the soccer team are merit. However, the African pupils are adamant that this is not the case.

This incident referred to above was an isolated incident that pupils interpreted as racist; however, in the study conducted by Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) in the UK they found that minority pupils experienced considerable joke telling based on race, religion and colour. This study revealed that there were a number of white pupils who strongly disapproved of racial jokes. Joke telling about black people by black people was quite common. I found this in all three schools, where African pupils made jokes about other African pupils and, more especially, about African pupils whom they referred to as ‘coconuts’ (brown on the outside and white on the inside). These jokes are, in fact, self-deprecating and may be related to the dilemma related to ethnic identity (Verma, Zec and Skinner, 1994). The social identity of many African and Indian pupils is constructed in these historically white Model C schools.

9.3 Social Identity

Social identity, according to Tajfel (1972, p. 31 in Bulhan 1978), is “the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of the group membership”. If a social group comprises “two or more individuals who share a common social
identification of themselves, or which is nearly the same thing, perceive themselves to be members of the same social category”, this is known as social identity (Turner, 1982, p. 15, in Bulhan, 1978).

Some essential aspects of social identity are communicated through these two quotations. Social identity and belonging to a group are inseparable with regard to the individual’s definition of who he/she is as described in terms of a social group of which the individual is a member. This identification is a psychological state and differs from just being known as part of a specific social category.

The social identity perspective has, in keeping with all theories or approaches, its derivation and intellectual pedigree. It has much in common with sociology in terms of characterising society as structured. However, in articulating the forces and obligations upon social groups to differentiate themselves from other groups rather than endeavour towards similarity, there appears to be a greater intellectual liability to ‘conflict’ theorists such as Marx and Weber than ‘consensus’ theorists such as Compte and Durkheim according to Dolby (2001).

Teachers’ attitudes to racial diversity impact negatively on a numbers of pupils who are made to feel inadequate, inferior, and worthless (Bulhan, 1978). Pupils are labelled (Meighan, 1994) and this obviously affects pupils’ social identity. Social class cannot be ignored, in terms of how pupils position themselves, as it is a fundamental aspect of social identity. Black (generic) pupils are generally the minority at these racially integrated institutions and they believe that they have to conform to the ethos of the school.

In essence, it appears as if the Indian pupils are ashamed of their own culture, as they choose to be part of the dominant culture of the school. Indian pupils and some of the African pupils behave in this manner as a result of certain assumptions that subjugated people carry with them. The assumption rests on the premise that they are inferior and should aspire to become more like the dominant group in order to be accepted and successful. It is natural then that some of these pupils would seek the social identity of the dominant group (Bulhan, 1978). These assumptions have to be reversed through a process and education is a means through which this can be accomplished.

Because of the restricted educational chances the black (generic) races have had, the majority of the pupils at these schools are situated in the first stage of acceptance, which is the “moving towards stage”. At this stage, the dominance of the controlling group is accepted because of the superiority that has been established by hegemony. Bulhan (1978) describes the first stage in his findings as the most harmful to
the individual. The adverse consequences that he lists are: “feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, social estrangement, external world control and external personal control, belief in the potency of powerful others, luck, or fate and therefore a high pessimism in one’s capacity to influence the world and personal destiny and a high uncertainty about one’s worth or future” (Bulhan, 1978 pp 76-77). Bulhan also alludes to “psychic conflict and turbulence” and indicates that “Western education in Africa contains much to breed negative identity, exaggerated individualism, and disdain of the ‘uneducated’ traditional masses, and marked class exploitation” (Bulhan, 1977, pp. 151-52). Perhaps for the reasons cited by Bulhan black (generic) pupils prefer to identify with the dominant group.

Although assimilation is favoured by teachers in the three research schools, there are many pupils who object to assimilation, and these pupils are regarded as deviant, when they are, in Bulhan’s (1978) words, “moving against”. Despite a vast number of pupils, who are assimilated, there are just as large a number of pupils who have not been assimilated, and who refuse to be but who would rather cling to their social identity.

At Esiphumelelayo, for example, many pupils have intentionally worked towards assimilation because they believe that because the school is considered to be elitist their status will automatically be elevated. Many of these pupils, when interviewed, said that their parents had sent them to this school because of its elitist reputation. Once again, pupils were relinquishing their identity in order to become elite graduates of the school. Amina attends this school because of parental pressure because it is one of the “top” schools in the city, but, given a chance, she would prefer to go to an ‘Indian’ school.

Bulhan’s (1978) theory of “reactive identification” is evident in all three schools. In two of the schools I was able to identify the pupils who were “moving towards” those were the pupils like Tshepo Prakash and Themba and Sifiso. The pupils who were “moving away” were Zaida and Amina and the pupils who were “moving against” were those pupils who openly rebelled and refused to be assimilated, specifically Sizwe. I have only given a few examples of pupils who fall into these categories, identified by Bulhan (1977, 1978). However, on closer scrutiny of the voluminous data collected there are many pupils to whom Bulhan’s (1978) reactive identification appeals.

Pindiwe believes that there is racism among the cultures because whenever there is conflict pupils “bring race into it”. This could be, perhaps, a consequence of poor inter-cultural understanding. She became
very emotional and burst into tears during the interview when she related what a certain teacher (allegedly) said: “All you black and Indian people really bring this school down”. Pindiwe perceived this teacher as being overtly racist.

Foster (1990), in his study in the UK, found that pupils who did not like school accused teachers of racism. On the other hand, pupils who favoured school found teachers to be too ‘soft and tolerant’ of disruptive pupils. In this study, I found that the majority of the pupils who complained about racism were, in fact, high achievers who were committed to their studies. Unlike Foster’s (1990) pupils, these pupils were not just being negative because they disliked school; they were merely relating their perceptions, which may or may not be valid.

Mrs Gunter from Esiphumelelayo was accused of singling out the African pupils. She finds this accusation amusing and says: “Well, if you feel I am picking on the blacks, it is your problem to sort it out, because I mean I know I am not prejudiced”. Mrs Timothy encountered something similar at Zama. She believes that there is a tendency among African pupils to immediately consider a teacher a racist when he/she punishes or reprimands them.

Anything where they are punished and the other race group are not being punished, like for homework not being done or coming in late or gelled their hair, and if you punish them, it is immediately racial.

(Mrs Timothy)

Teachers in the UK referred to pupils as “anti-school pupils” in Foster’s (1990) study and, when he interviewed three of these pupils, one boy claimed that the teachers were prejudiced and treated them badly. However, after further discussion it was established that the teacher was not racially prejudiced but that it could perhaps be a personality clash. Much of the perceived racism in the three schools could be personality clashes rather than overt prejudice or racism on the teachers’ part. Many pupils were distressed that the incidence of name-calling went unpunished and this could have led to the view that teachers were racist.

9.4 “... coolies and ... Boertjies”

Verbal abuse or name-calling has attracted considerable attention, and extensive data has been collected on the two (Verma, Zec & Skinner, 1994). Numerous accounts from pupils confirm that ‘name-calling’
persists in schools. Tarryn, from Phakamani, refers to a serious clash between a group of black girls and white boys because of name-calling, where the white boys (allegedly) called the African girls ‘kaffirs’. “White kids” in Catherine’s opinion, instigate quarrels by name-calling and stereotyping. Shakira, on the other hand, claims that a clash between Indian and White boys was a racist incident:

Well the kids said it wasn’t a racist act, but really, it looked like a racist act. Like it was any girls and any boys like the whites called the Indians ‘coolies’ and the Indians called the whites ‘poerties’. So that’s quite racist. They didn’t tell our principal that, they just said it wasn’t a racist act so they wouldn’t get into trouble.

(Shakira)

Mrs Naidoo confirms the fact that name-calling is still a problem at Esiphumelelayo:

At the end of the day you still hear you are white, or it is because you are black, ja because you’re a ‘cooie’ or this or that. At the end of the day you still hear that.

Tshepo was called a “kaffir” when he accidentally pushed a white girl on the stairs, so he swore at her in return. He believes the only way that such problems can be solved is by retaliating. Lesego mentioned a problem that persists in his class: Tyrone always calls the African pupils names:

**E P:** Have you experienced name-calling?

**Lesego:** Ja, Ma’am, in our class there is a boy who always calls us names and stuff Ma’am, and because he’s bigger than us ma’am, so we can’t call him back, Ma’am.

**E P:** Who is this boy?

**Lesego:** He’s a white, boy Ma’am.

**E P:** What do you think you should do when he calls you names?

**Lesego:** Ignore him, Ma’am.

**E P:** Is that going to solve the problem?

**Lesego:** Ma’am that’s what my parents told me to do, Ma’am. Says if somebody teases me or something I must just ignore them.

**E P:** Did you ever feel that you needed to tell your teacher that he was calling you names?

**Lesego:** Yes, Ma’am, but some of the teachers, Ma’am, they like don’t listen to us Ma’am.
E P: Can you give me an example?

Lesego: Ma’am, Mrs Kruger, Ma’am. The other time erm, he called my friend Ben a name Ma’am, then when we told Mrs Kruger, she told us “What’s wrong with that?”

E P: What did he call Ben?

Lesego: He called Ben a “kaffir” Ma’am.

E: So when the teacher asked “what’s wrong with that?” what was your reply?

Lesego: Ma’am, we just, we never said anything, Ma’am. ‘Cause all the like black children in the class, Ma’am, were like we didn’t even talk to the teacher anymore Ma’am, because when they call us names then she doesn’t say or do anything.

E P: Is Mrs Kruger your home–room teacher?

Lesego: No Ma’am.

E P: Why didn’t you tell your home–room teacher about this?

Lesego: He [the boy who called black children names] told us he’s gonna hit us if we do anything about this like if we tell, he’s gonna hit us, Ma’am, because he also said, calls our mothers names, and we don’t say anything.

According to Lesego, nothing is done when they are called names. Mrs Kruger’s response probably had the effect that she intended it to have; that is for the black pupils to withdraw and not complain. Pupils were not comfortable with going to any of the teachers after Mrs Kruger’s response. In fact, many of them claimed that they were afraid to go to teachers with complaints about white pupils because some teachers might react the way Mrs Kruger had, and other teachers would perhaps ostracise them. The extent to which teachers intervened was minimal because many pupils opted not to complain. The Afrikaans teacher’s comment was sufficient to discourage pupils from complaining. Some pupils believed that teachers were not aware of the abusive language used. Others said that teachers did little to deal with the matter, and yet other pupils preferred to deal with the problem themselves.

E P: Would you like to tell me about your experiences in a multiracial school?

Sarah: …And I have lots of Indian and black friends especially in my class; they are really nice people but some people treat them like dirt.

E P: Can you elaborate on that please? What do you mean by “some people treat them like dirt”?
Sarah: Well some of them throw like sticks and stones at them and call them uhm names and say that they are useless and no use to the community and that they just going to, like, take a bomb and throw it on squatter camps.

E P: You say some people. Who are these people?

Sarah: Well, most of the time it’s actually, some of the times it’s actually Indians but then some of the people, some of the white guys in my class, are really horrible to the black guys in my class. Actually, some of the black guys in my class are much nicer than the white guys so they are better friends, I guess.

E P: How do you feel about being in a multiracial school?

Sarah: I don’t think that people should look at the colour of a person’s skin. I think they should treat them equally. Because I mean we are all people, you know, and sometimes people can really get carried away…

E P: Can we just concentrate on your experiences in a multiracial school?

Sarah: Well this one time in class I was sitting in Maths and uhm there was this chick in my class, this black girl and for some reason I said something and then she turned around and she started shouting at me. And I was like sitting there just like keeping quiet and she’s blowing all these words and throwing all these words at me; it really hurt me, but then the teacher started shouting at her.

E P: What did she say to you?

Sarah: She said I am a stupid girl and all I’m trying to do is impress people and that I must get a life and I’m a whore and all this other stuff. I was like sitting there and I’m like, that’s not true, I’m not like that, I’m not like that at all.

Sarah claims that it is not only pupils who are guilty of name-calling but apparently teachers are just as guilty;

E P: Do you think that the teachers are fair to all the pupils?

Sarah: I think they are very fair, but sometimes they pick on us, like me they pick on me. Like this one teacher she calls me ‘an angel with a black halo’ because sometimes I talk a lot I really do and she says I get irritating. But like in Maths uhm she is always shouting at my white friends, my girl friends, she is always picking on me or Nadia and she’s sort of shouting for no reason. Nadia asks me for a pencil and she like shouts at her. And I’m sitting there and I say ‘Ma’am she only asked for a pencil and then she starts shouting at me. And we ask her can she please explain this to us and she says ‘Go ask someone else’. Now they are here to teach us, not to tell us to go ask someone else.

Sarah refers to insults hurled at black pupils. Amina tells of the “bad words” used by some pupils - words like “coolie” and “kaffir”. Some children complain to the principal about the name-calling, but nothing is
done according to Amina. The frequency of name-calling was high in schools with large numbers of ethnic minority students, according to Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994). The frequency of name-calling was high in all three schools where I conducted my research. Although Esiphumelelayo is supposedly, the elite school with fewer black pupils, name-calling was common. Both Zama and Phakamani have large numbers of black pupils and name-calling is common in these schools but not as prevalent as at Esiphumelelayo. Pupils reacted differently from one another to name-calling as may be seen from their remarks.

According to pupils’ interviews, Mr Peters called the African pupils “Americans” in jest, but many black pupils perceived this as a racist insult and objected to it. Many African pupils regard the American pop culture as “hip and cool” and this is probably why Mr Peters teases these pupils and calls them “Americans”. It was not apparent during observations that pupils took offence to being called “Americans” as they laughed when Mr Peters referred to them in this way.

Observations of teachers’ and pupils’ interaction provided interesting insights into attitudes and behaviour. Staff often have generalised images of black (generic) pupils. Some teachers displayed sensitivity to their pupils while, generally, teachers’ views reflect a number of misconceptions about their pupils. Teachers related various incidents about pupils and all these incidents as may be seen in previous chapters are related to the pupils’ race and background, and how they as teachers interact with their pupils. At Zama, Mr Mark is forthright in his comments about his relationship with black pupils in his classes:

**E P:** Do you find that the black and Indian pupils interact with you?

**Mr Mark:** No, that is a very individual thing. Some of them I get on well with, and there are some of them I don’t get on well with. But that goes with the whites as well. There are some white children that I don’t get on well with at all, and it’s just vice versa.

**E P:** Do these pupils interact with each other in class?

**Mr Mark:** What I have - one you might have noticed when you were sitting in on my lessons - is that I seat them, I don’t let them seat themselves. I actually seat them specifically so that they don’t sit next to each other, so they have to interact in some kind of way, even if it’s just in Science.

**E P:** So was there any objection to your seating arrangements?
**Mr Mark:** Definitely! I mean friends wanted to sit next to each other. But I just wouldn’t allow that and even if it is half way through the year, I find that they still sneak back to each other. And I just have to keep moving them away, so there is, there is definite opposition to that whole idea, but I think it has a lot of benefits.

Mr Mark has extensive experience in his subject as he has been teaching in excess of twenty years. He has taught in historically white Model C schools and has been at Zama since the admission of the first African learner. He is in favour of diversity in the schools and would like to see total integration. From the above excerpt from Mr Mark’s interview it is obvious that he has made attempts to enforce integration among his pupils. However, many educational theorists do not advise forced integration as it may have the reverse effect to the one intended.

Mrs Naidoo has generally been accepted well by most pupils and teachers at Esiphumelelayo. However, she finds that Indian pupils show more disrespect towards her than do the white and African pupils.

**E P:** How have the pupils accepted you since you are the only teacher of colour on the staff?

**Mrs Naidoo:** Generally, I have been accepted well and with much respect. Generally, in fact, I have often said that I find more disrespect coming from the Indian children towards me than I do coming from the white children. Uhm sadly, because I don’t understand why. I don’t know if it is maybe if they maybe feel that because I am Indian they have no need to express respect or something like that. Because, whenever a white child passes he or she will greet or even if I reprimand one of them they will accept it. They will put their heads down and they will take it for what it is. Whereas the Indian child, I have experienced will back chat, will look me in the face, things like that. And mm, it’s mind boggling because I expected the opposite. I expected some sort of identification and like okay, and this is wonderful, but it hasn’t been that way.

**E P:** That does sound quite disappointing.

**Mrs Naidoo:** It is, it is very disappointing. When I go home that is the sort of thing I tell my mother. I tell my mum that I don’t understand why, uhm they’re blatantly rude and I know it is not in their culture. I know it is not a cultural thing, you see.

Perhaps these Indian pupils perceive Mrs Naidoo as their conscience, because she reminds them of their heritage when all they want is to be assimilated into the mainstream of this historically white school.

Mr Peters claims to have excellent relationships with the African boys. However, he finds that he cannot relate to the girls. “They are rude and arrogant” and he claims that when he addresses these girls they speak in the vernacular to each other. Mr Peters finds this very difficult because he says he is aware that they are talking about him even though he does not understand what is being said. He also believes that
he cannot work on his relationship with the girls because he does not interact with them in sport as he does with the boys. However, there are a few girls in some of his classes with whom he has developed a good working relationship. I was able to observe Mr Peters’ good rapport with the boys, but the African girls sat in a group to one side of the classroom, talking in the vernacular and making a noise. They paid no attention to Mr Peters when he asked them to be quiet.

Mrs Gunter compares the manner in which an African child argues with her and the way a white child argues with her. She quotes an example when she allocated marks and an African pupil argued with her about the marks, stating that he knew the answer and he should have been awarded higher marks. Mrs Gunter points out that she cannot award marks on what pupils think they know because everyone would get full marks, but she finds that the black pupils do not understand this, and consequently accuse her of unfairness. At that point, she has her say and refuses to entertain any further argument. According to Mrs Gunter, white pupils do not expect marks for something that they have not answered.

“I get on quite well with the black girls in my home room class and my Science class and that’s about it. My Grade 8s, I don’t know” says Ms John. Observation records of Miss John’s class indicate that she is an efficient teacher, but throughout all her lessons there were no light-hearted moments. She did not interact with the pupils other than to mention something work related or to give them an instruction. Once Miss John had completed her explanation or completed marking exercises, she stood to one side of the classroom with her arms folded and watched the pupils while they worked. The atmosphere in the classroom was quite tense. Pupils only addressed Miss John if they needed help; otherwise they got on with their work. Even the white pupils did not interact with Miss John, who never smiled. Perhaps Miss John’s disposition could be attributed to the fact that she is a young teacher who believes in keeping her distance and not becoming over familiar with the pupils.

Inter-ethnic relationships are complex and Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994, p. 101) found in their study of fourteen schools that a number of ethnic minority pupils complained about constantly being “picked on”, a feeling of “injustice”, “scapegoating” and “racism”. All these complaints were evident in the interviews in my study.

In all three schools, I noted that all the pupils generally do not interact much with their teachers. I observed that teachers are too busy trying to complete the work that they have to do and, consequently,
do not interact favourably with their pupils. The atmosphere in many of the classrooms was oppressive and tense, whereas in others, pupils were free and chatted easily with teachers.

In order to gain a clear picture of interaction in the school it is necessary to pay attention to pupil interaction.

**E P:** Do the pupils from the different race groups interact in your classes, specifically at Grade 8 level?

**Mrs Gabriel:** Not really. I think there is a natural segregation that happens where the black children tend to stick together and there is err much more integration between the Indian and Coloured and the white children. They tend to integrate, to form friendships, sit together and that sort of thing. But in the class, you get a natural segregation with the black children. Definitely! From the stronger academic class through to the weaker academic class.

This preference of the black pupils to remain in their own groups could stem from the fact that in groups they do not feel as vulnerable as they would if each individual was on his/her own. Also, these pupils may want to experience a sense of homogeneity being with pupils of the same group who share common interests (Garcia, 1991; Verma, Zec and Skinner, 1994) reported in their study in the UK that friendships usually develop between pupils from the same ethnic group and, although some pupils claimed to have close friendships with other groups these friendships did not confirm the quality of inter-ethnic relationships in the school.

**E P:** What can you tell me about the interaction between the pupils of the various race groups?

**Mrs Matthew:** I think people; the children learn to tolerate one another. They, I think that seven or eight years ago it was no way that you would have thought of socialising with black children. Uhm, I mean they do now and there's absolutely, well I won't say absolutely, but there, it's far more easy for them to, to mix. And from my own experience at home you know, my children have other children of other races at home, which I think the school situation helps.

Mrs Matthew’s mention of tolerance identifies a certain degree of acceptance on behalf of the white pupils. However, this is contradictory to what black and Indian pupils had to say as they identified instances of racism on the part of many white pupils. Perhaps Mrs Matthew’s perception is not totally incorrect, because observations of the Grade 8 classes that she teaches point to the fact that there were no overt problems among the various race groups. Mrs Matthew’s remark about her home life could have been prompted by my race, as she probably wanted me to know that people from the various race groups are welcome in her home.
Mrs Michael, like Mrs Matthew, strongly believes that children from the various cultural groups learn
tolerance and are now becoming friends because they have a better understanding of each other. Mrs
Michael says that she would like to see “even more integration and more understanding”.

Unfortunately, I did not often observe this tolerance and understanding that Mrs Michael mentions.
During breaks I walked around the playground, observing pupils, and it was very difficult to identify
integration. All the pupils that I observed were in own–race groups. African pupils were always together,
I did see the occasional Indian and white learner walking around together, but generally there is, what Mrs
Gabriel referred to as, “a natural segregation”. Many pupils, as well as teachers, related incidents such as
name-calling that culminated in fights.

9.5 “You learn to interact with different races”

A number of pupils from the schools were very positive about interaction with various race groups.
“They just need to interact with each other and get on with life”, says Tarryn. She adds that single-race
classrooms actually promote racism and that if an individual makes the effort to befriend pupils of
different race groups the situation will improve. However, she believes that “if the individual does not
make an effort then he/she becomes the enemy – two wrongs don’t make a right”.

Tshepo enjoys interaction with other pupils and he feels that it would be good to teach pupils his
language. The benefits of attending a multicultural school are good, according to Lesego. Black pupils
“get to know the other race groups better”, he says, and he would like to work at improving the racial
interactions in his school, but he believes that when everybody believes as he does, they can accomplish
much in groups. He confessed to having a better understanding of the Indian children than of the whites.
Sarah finds that she gets on well with both African and Indian pupils and any fights that she encountered
were between whites and whites and generally among the same–race groups; something she refers to as
“cat fights.”

“I got to know how the different race groups react to different things” claims Amina. She believes that a
multicultural classroom is necessary training for the real world, where one encounters various race groups
and will be expected to interact “I think it is good, like if you have to go and work somewhere and there’s
like mixed races”. Single-race classrooms, according to Amina, do not prepare one for the world of work.
“I am going to interact with multiracial people in the world, so I had better get used to it now” says Lerato. If he went to a single-race school, he says, he would not be prepared to deal with a multicultural world. Marijke is adamant that there is no discrimination in her school.

**E P:** Tell me what your experiences are in a multiracial school?

**Marijke:** Okay, Uhm, I interact better with the Indian culture than I do with the blacks. I don’t know if it’s something or me being racial or discriminative like that but. Uhm on the whole Indians I take it they fit in better with everything else. Some black people just stay in their little groups. Like the Chinese people as well: they have their little groups separate from everyone else. They don’t interact with anyone. But I don’t know; I think the whites and Indians and sometimes, black people interact better. Like my friends, I have got a best friend who is an Indian. And, ja, she is my best friend! So we can interact if we want to.

**E P:** So how do you feel about the different race groups in your class?

**Marijke:** I think it is a very good idea because as you interact with these people you learn so much more about their cultures, religion and stuff. I enjoy it. I feel that I am actually learning something while just being with my friends. While last year it was all white, all the same religion, all the same culture it was getting boring. Now you learn things.

**E P:** Which school do you come from?

**Marijke:** Laerskool Stad

**E P:** What made you come to an English–medium school?

**Marijke:** We thought that by the time I get to Matric an English Matric Certificate would mean so much more than an Afrikaans one. Afrikaans is going down and English is the language of the country at this stage.

**E P:** You have come into a school with an English culture and you have to interact with different cultures. What can you tell me about it?

**Marijke:** Ja, it is actually quite easy because these people accept you with open arms. They don’t discriminate because they know you are Afrikaans or something.

**E P:** When you say “these people” who are you referring to?

**Marijke:** The English people.

Although Marijke comes from an Afrikaans background she has been accepted by the English-speaking pupils and, in her opinion, there is no discrimination. It could be argued that she has been accepted because she is white, whereas pupils from other race groups meet with resentment and discrimination.
Certain white pupils resent the presence of African and Indian pupils in their schools. This could be related to prejudices that white pupils have as a consequence of their backgrounds.

Catherine concurs with some pupils that interacting with people from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds helps the individual to learn and grow. However, Zaida referred to her class specifically, where the Indian and black children got on well but the white and African girls did not interact much, nor did they relate to each other. Sizwe believes that it is difficult to interact with white girls. Sizwe is able to socialise with all races but he says; “It comes to a certain point where you have to get somebody of your own kind to talk to”. He maintains that “most of us have been raised to stick to your own kind”, the Indian boys all hang out together, like birds of a feather flock together that kind of thing”.

As a class captain at Phakamani, Themba sees the importance of interacting with other race groups for fear of being labelled a racist. Vusi recommends that the different races interact to learn more about the various cultures, and from his experience in a culturally diverse school, he claims: “I have learnt that people needn’t be racists in this world; they just need to interact with each other and get on with life” Deshni admits that she prefers talking to her Indian friends. Tshepo believes that whites and blacks don’t like each other because they’re always in separate groups. Marijke confirms this because “all the pupils remain in their own race groups like the Chinese people as well; they have their little groups, separate from everyone else; they don’t interact with anyone”.

A multicultural school is a good idea in Lerato’s opinion, but: “it will take some time to get going because people invariably choose to congregate in their own groups because you know at the moment it’s a bit. you get the Indian people and the white people in clusters and black standing alone – and it’s not very stable”.

This is because he believes people “feel vulnerable when they go into other cultures”. Themba has been in a multicultural school all his life and, although he gets on well with other race groups, he prefers to socialise with his race group, as do the whites and Indians. The pupils in his class do interact, but they are not close; “I think they feel more comfortable with their own race”.

“A few are racist and they won’t show it to your face”, believes Amina and she confirms that there is a preference for own race and this is evident in the seating in class. This she believes is because. “they relate better to people that are the same colour as them.” In his experience, when he was in the
elementary classes, Tshepo maintains that “nobody worried about race”, but he encountered racism and name-calling when he reached Standard 3 and 4, when pupils began to be offensive to one another. The Taiwanese girl, Tan, said that she preferred spending her breaks with the other Taiwanese pupils, “because they easy to connect with each other”, confirming what Marijke said about the Chinese pupils keeping to themselves at her school.

Pupils spoke about their friendships with the various race groups. Although, initially, Tarryn had problems with the cultural mix she has made “quite good friends with pupils from other races”. Pupils are unfriendly towards her, when she is “friendly with everyone”.

Tshepo recommends that the solution to racial problems “is to treat every one on an equal basis”. In addition, Tshepo finds that pupils in his class co–operate. Sarah has friends from all race groups and cannot explain why other white pupils find it difficult to befriend black and Indian pupils; she puts it down to “skin colour”. In her opinion, “blacks and Indians are ‘no problem people’. You get to know them, they are really no problem. Well that’s speaking for most of them”. Her friendship with black and Indian pupils extends to her social life. She socialises with them: “I'm not scared how people look at me 'cause, I mean, they are my friends; and frankly I don’t care because they are like any other person”. She finds the white pupils look at her strangely and some have begun to ostracise her for having black and Indian friends. However, she is not concerned. “They treat me better than some white people I know”. Sarah’s contends that “You’ve gotta be friends with everyone. It works much better that way”.

Marijke has a very intimate friendship with Shamira. Her mother and Shamira’s mother are friends as well “and that makes it even better”, says Marijke. However, she states: “My grandmother doesn’t like it much. She is very into the whites stay with the whites and the blacks stay with the blacks, Indians go to the Indians”.

All Catherine’s friends are from different race groups and even though their beliefs differ, “It’s never bugged me”. She does not have white friends and she has two very close friends, Kamala and Renitha, and she finds them to be ‘really nice people.’ She, like Marijke, is not concerned about the opinions of other white pupils. Although some negative issues emerged from the above discussions there appears to be a positive trend coming through in terms of friendships between the race groups.
Despite the fact that there are racial tensions in the three schools these tensions do not appear as grave as those in Gillborn’s (1990) research schools. He refers to ethnicity and racial harassment where Asians were frequently at the receiving end of racial attacks from their white peers. Gillborn (1990) refers to his field notes where he encountered four white boys insulting an Asian boy. He also found that white pupils constantly harassed Asian boys. Although in my study, pupils complained about incidents I did not witness any such consistent harassment during my observations. Perhaps the duration of my visit to each site was not sufficiently long for me to witness what I might have, had I spent more time in the field. These pupils’ responses are encouraging, however, Bot (1987, p.46) contends that overseas experiences illuminate that the probability of improvement of social relationships in integrated schools should be dealt with cautiously. She adds: “interaction usually continues to reflect ethnic identities and affiliations in the community”.

9.6 “…fights…it has never been a racial thing but it always seems to be”

Fights were described by many of the pupils and teachers, who claimed that the majority of the fights were racially instigated. Mrs Naidoo was one of the teachers who was quite upset by the fights between the pupils.

**E P:** Do all the pupils relate amicably to each other or are there problems?

**Mrs Naidoo:** Yes there are problems. There have been quite a few racist incidents, to such an extent, earlier this year (2000). There was such a big fight between [pause] I think it was a black boy and two white boys or something like that. And he actually wanted to expose the school for racism and all those sorts of things. Admittedly uhmm, Mr Christian is a very, very diplomatic and fair principal uhmm, I suppose he would have to be, by being a principal of a school and firstly a priest, and being a principal of such a large school. So the way he handled the situation. It really made the, it took the focus away from racism and made it just a character clash. So that was a good thing. Another thing was Indian boys fighting with white boys, I think it was while you were here and they said over and over again it wasn’t a racist, err it didn’t stem from racism. But at the end of the day that’s what it is, one of the things

**E P:** What actually caused these incidents?

**Mrs Naidoo:** I don’t know what the causes are but the boy, the children are just so different. When I, when I was speaking to some teacher she said that the Indian children are exceptionally conniving. Because the other day the Maths teacher was telling me err, she and this other teacher were worried about collecting the Maths test (question paper) straight after the exams, so I asked, “What’s the big rush”? And she said
to show you what the Indian boys do in my class is they take down the sums in the test and some of them give it to the other children after the test, before those children write the test.

EP: That is really being dishonest

Mrs Naidoo Now you see it is things like that that makes you think, where did they learn these things. It happens in Indian schools, I have seen it. I went to an Indian school up to right up to standard five. I know these things happen. So where do they come up with this? They bring it from the Indian schools, so they do things like that, really conniving things. Things you don’t even think they would do.

The manner in which the principal handled the fights is a good example of conflict limitation. that removed the racist element from the conflict. Mrs Naidoo mentioned another incident, where Indian and white boys fought and the principal and white teachers continuously emphasised the fact that that the fight was not racist, although it was over emphasised pupils and teachers believed it was a racist clash. Mr Peters, also from Esiphumelelayo, has his own explanation about fights at his school and believes that these are not racist clashes:

EP: You mentioned tensions between the various race groups in some classes. What can you tell me about this?

Mr Peter: Ja, there have been a few fights…it has never been a racial thing but it always seems to be like between the different races. So…There was one um, racial incident, but it, in fact, I am lying, it didn’t come, it came across as a racial incident, but it wasn’t brought about because of a racial incident. It was two guys had a huge fight that um, and it turned into a racial incident, but it really didn’t start off like that. It started off as a bad game of soccer that turned a bit rough. I would rate it just as a guy’s fight not a racial fight you know. I don’t think there has been any…there was at the beginning of the term a racial incident between the Indian guys and the white guys where there seemed to be the same things. It started off all the Indian guys were friends; all the white guys were friends. It started outside the school and then it just festered and then turned into a fight. So the same thing I just say, I’m not, I mean when I was at school the exact same thing happened between Matrics and Standard 9s and there was a huge fight and no one said anything, because it was just white, you know. But if it was the exact same thing that happened and it seemed to be integration, but it wasn’t. I don’t think so, anyway.

Mr Peter believes that because two race groups were involved in the fight, it was made out to be a racist incident. I was at the school when the fight broke out between the white and Indian pupils. In fact, it was on the second day of my observation at the school. The fight took place during break and pupils called the male teachers to intervene. The teachers soon broke up the fight and, after the break, the principal used the public address system to summons the boys to his office. “Those Indians involved in the fight come to my office immediately”. Later, Indian pupils mentioned their dissatisfaction with the use of the words “those Indians”. They believed that the principal was singling out the Indian boys and
by mentioning the word ‘Indian’ they perceived this as an accusation. The Indian pupils felt that it would have been sufficient to say ‘those boys’ without mentioning the race of the boys.

The day after this fight between the white and Indian boys the principal called an assembly and addressed the pupils about “hooliganism” and how he would not tolerate fighting on the school premises. He stressed the fact that he would take severe action if pupils were caught fighting. Throughout his address, he emphasised the fact that this fight was not racially motivated but just a difference of opinion between the boys. He also got the boys who were involved in the fight to come up and make it clear to the entire school that this fight was not as a result of racism. Dwelling on the fact that it was not a racist fight drew attention to the fight. This was perhaps an attempt to convince pupils and teachers that racism was not involved. However, this entire exercise did little to detract from the fact that the fight was racially instigated, as casual discussions with both pupils and teachers confirmed.

During my interview with the principal he stated that he had no problems with racism in his school, apart from a few incidents which he very quickly dealt with. He claimed that his pupils got on well and, although there were fights sometimes, between Indian and white boys, they were not racist incidents, but just fights between boys. Discussions with teachers and pupils did not confirm Mr Christian’s claim that the fight was not racially instigated.

At Phakamani, Mrs Gabriel stated that she had not encountered any serious clashes, apart from arguments in class between African and white pupils, where white pupils would say:

**Mrs Gabriel:** Ja but you okes all drive taxis and make fortunes and you don’t pay taxes and you expect the Government to give you houses and our parents have to work and pay taxes - they don’t expect the Government to give them houses.

The black pupils responded to this quite aggressively, but Mrs Gabriel claims that this argument ended when the lesson ended. Pupils, on the other hand, pointed out that these fights continued in the playground. However, the pupils stated that the principal did not tolerate racism in any form and she took a very harsh line with perpetrators of racist attacks. Mrs Phillip, the principal of Phakamani, has, in fact, had to suspend certain pupils for racism. She claims that her pupils know that she will take very harsh measures if she encounters any racist incidents.

Mrs Timothy at Zama tells of tensions in her home–room class:
**E P:** Have you encountered any problems with the diverse races in your class?

**Mrs Timothy:** Yes, I actually did in my first year here. My homeroom class, there was a lot of tension among the black pupils and the white pupils in the class. Uhm I tried to sort of quieten things down, you know, let both sides be realistic, err but there were two particular white girls that were very anti-black and she had her reasons why. Apparently, her father had been hijacked or something and she just put it all out of proportion and it just brought up tension to such an extent that I wouldn’t allow them to go to assembly. Then I sent for their tutor to come in, a Departmental Head who would be able to cope with the situation.

**E P:** So how did she resolve the situation?

**Mrs Timothy:** The pupils who had the major problems were called out. And their parents were called in. And they tried to sort out the problem on a one–to– one basis, rather than get the whole class involved. Which I think is what these girls were trying to do.

Mrs Timothy dealt with this by sending for the Grade tutor and the Head of Department to solve the problem. She felt that both senior members of staff coped very well with the problem because they approached it on a “one-to-one” basis rather than involving the entire class, because Mrs Timothy believes that that was precisely what the white girls were trying to do.

Pupils mentioned fights at both Phakamani and Esiphumelelayo and, to a lesser extent, at Zama. Many pupils at Esiphumelelayo enjoyed relating the stories about the fights:

**E P:** So you say you only discovered tensions among the various groups when you came to High School. Can you tell me more about it?

**Sarah:** Yes, actually there was no, not any physical fighting at primary school. But like here, I have seen at least twelve fights already. But not like, some of them were like girl fights, black girls and stuff. But most of them were like guy fights with blacks Indians and whites involved…

**E P:** I was here when two boys came up and in assembly and announced that the fight that they were involved in the previous day was not racially motivated. Is that one of the fights that you just referred to?

**Sarah:** I was standing there and then I turned around and this white guy had this Indian guy underneath his arm and he started throwing punches. And he had two black eyes the next day. Which was pretty bad, but I think no that they are probably lying because jeez you don’t actually do that to anyone.

According to Zaida white girls pick fights with African girls and the African girls fight back instead of ignoring the white girls. Zaida, however, was extremely upset about the fight between the Indian boys and white boys and is quite emphatic that it was racially instigated. In his description of the same ‘notorious’ fight, Sizwe saw ‘someone throw a brick that hit this Indian guy in the face.’ When he
enquired about the cause of the fight he was told that it had started on Saturday night at the mall and that it had continued at school on that Monday.

Themba describes fights that take place in his class among the white pupils that take on a racial tone when African pupils interfere. He says, “There is a problem with an African girl and a white girl. The African girl called the white girl a prostitute and there was a fight because of that”. This, according to Themba, “is just a girl fight and not a racial thing”. Most pupils, according to Themba, believe that the fight between the Indian and white boys was a racial incident, even though the principal insisted that it was not a racial clash. Apparently, the Indian parents phoned the school and were very upset because they believed that the fight was racially motivated. A fight that Kristen had recently witnessed was between an Indian girl in Grade 8 and a white girl in Grade 11, she emphasised that it was not racially motivated, but rather a misunderstanding between the two girls – more a personality clash. Kristen also believed that the fight between the Indian and white boys was not a racist fight.

Mr Khumalo from Phakamani confirmed the premise that races are unlikely to integrate because he found that pupils invariably remained in their own racial and religious groups. At Esiphumelelayo, Mrs Naidoo found pupils’ attitudes very interesting; she finds that the various cultural groups are more relaxed than they were the previous year. Pupils formed “cliques”, as she called them, and she believes that the reason they are antagonistic towards each other is that pupils lack the knowledge of the various cultures in their class (Hernandez, 1989; Garcia, 1991). Mrs Naidoo claims that this lack of understanding makes her teaching difficult. In her experiences, pupils from the different cultural groups do not know how to cope with each other. Mr Peters confirms that pupils prefer their own race groups, particularly the girls, who are always in their own groups. The Indian boys also remain in their own groups. African pupils generally congregate in their own groups but do mix in the soccer team. Mr Mark, at Zama, confirms that pupils prefer to interact within their own race groups and believes that it is the pupils’ choice with whom they interact.

I think because at breaks the African children tend to speak their own language; that is still a fact and I don’t know if we will ever get past that one. It is a language thing, more than a racial thing.

Mrs Timothy, also from Zama, believes that inter-racial interaction is better now; she finds that, overall, pupils are ‘mixing’, but in certain classes there is a preference for own-race groups. Mrs Timothy tried to
enforce integration but she received negative responses, so, she says, “I have just left it”. As pupils moved through successive age groups there was a strong tendency towards friendships within their own ethnic groups (Gillborn, 1990; Verma, Zec & Skinner, 1994). This is a difficult area to draw generalisations because many studies have not been able to provide conclusive evidence (Gillborn, 1990). Despite the varied responses to race and racism, some pupils prefer to adopt the attitude that inter-cultural mixing is something that has to be learnt.

“Bullying is common in schools in the UK where numerous incidents were reported about bullying culminating in physical abuse” (Verma, Zec & Skinner, 1994, p. 86; Troyna, 1993; Gillborn, 1990). From this discussion of fights it is evident that bullying and fights were experienced in all three schools in the study. Additionally, the media has reported a number of cases of physical abuse where black pupils were physically abused by white pupils and vice versa. In Verma, Zec and Skinner’s (1994) experience, many pupils preferred not to report these racial attacks to teachers for several reasons. The minority pupils in their study found that teachers did not take action against the perpetrators, while some teachers were indifferent and others feigned ignorance. Overall, minority pupils refrained from complaining to white teachers. A correspondence may be identified between the minority pupils in the UK and the black pupils in my small study in a city.

9.7 Summary

African and Indian pupils interviewed who perceived racism in the words and actions of their teachers mentioned specific teachers and conceded that there were some teachers to whom they related well. A smaller number of pupils interviewed were critical of specific teachers or teachers in general. Verma, Zec, and Skinner (1994) refer to Tomlinson (1989, in Verma Zec and Skinner, 1994) who found that although there is a very poor correlation between a child’s enthusiasm for school and the level of praise received from teachers, there is a very strong relationship between blame and a learner’s perception of mistreatment. The evidence from this sample indicates a predominant concern among some black and Indian pupils about perceived mistreatment by teachers. For a few this mistreatments included elements of alleged racism.

A number of the pupils, as well as the teachers’ inadequate handling of abusive language referred to name-calling. Pupils felt that the issue of name-calling and abusive language had not been addressed
satisfactorily nor was any action taken against the offenders. Pupils believed that teachers should play a more significant role in deterring the use of abusive language and name-calling.

Social identity received attention, as pupils were relinquishing their social identities in favour of the identity of the dominant group.

There were positive comments about inter-cultural mixing from both pupils and teachers and, although there is considerable tension at times, there are very positive individuals who anticipate a successful future for racially integrated schools.

The next chapter highlights the conclusions reached from these finding and the findings from the preceding four chapters. Recommendations are made based on both the teachers’ and pupils’ responses.