Chapter Ten:

THE FUTURE OF RACIALLY DIVERSE CLASSES

“If there ever was a societal function that has global consequences for humankind, it is the education of us all”.

(Fullan, 2000, p. 268)

10.1 Introduction

I used what Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994, p. 105) refer to as a “mixed method research approach embodied in multi–case studies” for this study. “Setting the Scene” is part I of the thesis where Chapters One to Four provide the theoretical underpinning and methodology used in the study.

In Chapter One the rationale for the study, as well as the aims objectives and justification for the study are presented. Thereafter I present the theoretical framework derived from literature in the field, covered in Chapters Two and Three.

The design, research questions, methodology with a description of sites and participants are established in Chapter Four. The intention in this chapter was to familiarise the reader with the methodology and my preference for the particular research methods employed.

Part II of the study “The Scene Unfolds” focused specifically on the research findings.

My aim was to gain access to schools, interact with both teachers and pupils, and probe their experiences through recording what they said and observing what they did.

The result, to be expected, has generated a considerable amount of data. The information that provided the basis for Chapters Five to Nine enabled me in this chapter to group a summary of findings into a number of interrelated issues each seen as influencing teaching and learning in culturally and racially diverse classrooms and/or developing inter-cultural relationships.
10.2 Summary of Findings

10.2.1 Change, Subjective Reality and Assimilation

The emergent results underscored teachers’ subjective reality because of change, Chapter Five focused on change and the meaning of change for teachers. The assimilationist approach was discussed in this chapter and emerged as a pervasive theme in my data (Fullan, 1993; 1999; 2000). It is evident from the findings in Chapters Five and Six that most teachers experienced teaching in the “new” racially and culturally diverse classrooms as frustrating, problematic, and difficult. Chapter Six, although an extension of Chapter Five, focused on teachers’ perceptions of pupils’ language ability and disciplinary problems as a consequence of the change in the classroom population. The findings of this research show how the personal and interpersonal and intrapersonal factors relate to and are shaped by the changed environment, namely the demographics at the three schools that have impacted on the teachers and their need to function in classrooms where the demographics have changed. The subjective reality of teachers is evident in the analysed data. Most of the teachers indicated the INSET programmes provided in the schools to assist them to teach in racially diverse classrooms have not addressed their (teachers’) needs adequately And emphasised the need for more relevant INSET programmes.

Assimilation emerged as a very strong theme throughout Part Two although the word was not mentioned as such by teachers or learners. Many theorists view assimilation as a negative force that consumes a minority group totally (Liston & Zeichner, 1996; Todd, 1991; Giddens, 1989). Since assimilation did not occur at a rapid rate, teachers’ subjective reality emerged which is evidenced by the rhetoric of the interviews.

Power-relations emerged as a theme where teachers experienced a loss of power because of the racially diverse classrooms. This is evident in their complaints about language and discipline. When pupils experience exclusion or when they are unable to respond to the opportunities that teachers provide for them they are liable to establish sub-cultures in which they have the power to function. Consequently, teachers encounter ‘anti-groups’ who seek ways to be noticed through deviant behaviour (Verma, 1993). The analysis of data revealed the power structures at play in the three schools. Nelson and Wright’s (1995) conceptualisation of ‘power over’ is evident in this study, as pupils are enabled to exercise power in the classroom through language and discourse.
The combined conclusions from Chapters Five and Six of this study confirm the assertions of those researchers who discuss change in education and the impact this change has on teachers’ performance in the classroom. The qualitative study conducted by Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) in the UK during the early 1990s investigated nine schools, as opposed to the three schools in this study. Whereas their study examined the behaviour of teachers and pupils in depth, my study examined teachers’ and pupils’ experiences in racially diverse classrooms. Verma, Zec and Skinner’s (1994) study provided a much more detailed analysis of multi–ethnic schools than this study but what my study achieved was a confirmation of many of Verma Zec and Skinner’s findings as well as the findings of a number of other studies cited in the literature review that have spanned a longer period than mine.

The conception of multiculturalism in the final decade of the previous century has relevance for South African education as it examines the relationship of power, equality and gender, principles which may be found in the Manifesto on Values in Education (2001). What was most surprising is that the majority of the teachers interviewed had little or no knowledge, and in some cases had not even heard of multicultural education. Perhaps if teachers themselves had taken the initiative to explore ways and means of dealing with cultural/racial diversity, they might have discovered multicultural education.

10.2.2 Discourse of Blame and Cultural Deficit Discourse
The findings of this study suggest that teachers from all three schools engaged in a discourse of blame. The major influences of the discourse of blame in this study were seen in terms of teachers’ comments on pupils’ backgrounds and previous schooling (Solorzano & Yosso 2001; Whitehouse & Colvin 2001; Ladson Billings 1995). The basis of pupils’ failure or success is located within their backgrounds, speech and language. Most of the teachers interviewed with the exception of Mrs Naidoo and Mrs Michael engaged in a discourse of blame when discussing their pupils’ academic ability.

Cultural deficit discourse was evident in teachers’ exchange of ideas about their pupils. Similar to researchers and writers who advocated this theory in the UK and the USA all the teachers who engaged in this theory were white. Underprivileged social and personal backgrounds were identified as the reasons for the low academic achievements of African pupils once again. UK and USA researchers in the 1960s and 1970s identified black pupils’ problems if a language other than English was a first language as well as poor socio-economic and educational background of family (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Whitehouse & Colvin, 2001; Ladson & Billings, 1995). These two very important themes are covered in Chapter Seven.
10.2.3  **Home culture versus school culture**

A common definition of the concept of culture is that it comprises an individual’s understanding of the characteristics of his or her society or sub-group within that society, as well as the values, beliefs and ideas relating to acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (Garcia, 1994). Explicit culture is seen in and describable through dress, speech, tools and concrete behaviour (Hernandez, 1989; Gillborn, 1990; Troyna, 1994). The idea of cultural deprivation still exists in historically white former Model C schools and the cultures of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are ignored, and their languages and heritages disregarded.

If they are seen negatively, the task of educating becomes very difficult. Frequently, educators have the task of communicating between and among individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds. They have to bridge cultural differences.

(Liston & Zeichner, 1996, p. 48)

The following questions are pertinent when culture is considered in a classroom

*Whose culture will be facilitated? Is there such a thing as a common culture? What culture does the student bring to the classroom? In addition, what is the role of the teacher in this meaning–facilitation process?*

However, these questions have not been asked in the classrooms in the three schools. Answering these questions will only be fruitful if teachers are engaged in reflective teaching according to Liston and Zeichner (1996).

Another theme that emerged very strongly from interviews with pupils was what they believed was teacher indifference. Pupils viewed the colour-blind approach with scepticism and believed that many teachers were insensitive. While some teachers preferred the colour-blind approach, many pupils claimed that teachers stereotyped African pupils through their continuous comparison of the cognitive abilities of African and white pupils. Teachers’ talk resembled two of the three dimensions of racial stereotypes as described by Solorzano and Yosso (2001) namely; education and educational stereotypes, personality or character stereotypes.

10.2.4  **Perceived Racism or Racism as a Consequence of Change**

This research highlighted the occurrence of overt and covert racism in all three schools. These findings concur with the literature, in particular the study by Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994, p. 88) which examined “sociability, hostility and indifference”. Racism emerged as one of the strongest themes in this
study despite the fact that I had no intention of investigating racism in this study. and the theme of racism is covered in Chapter Nine.

The theme of social identity was also covered in Chapter Nine. Many African and Indian pupils believed that if they identify with the dominant group in the school they would be accepted. Of particular concern for this study is the manner in which pupils have positioned themselves into specific categories of identification in an attempt to become acceptable in their surroundings (the school). The social identity of pupils emerged very strongly, especially at Esiphumelelayo where pupils negated their own identity in favour of that of the dominant group. Esiphumelelayo is known as an elitist school in the city and African and Indian pupils who attend this school probably are under the misconception that it would benefit them to be assimilated and to emulate the dominant group. The pupils in this study have entered a new era where apartheid has ended and, as Dolby (2001, p. 10) argues, “it is part of the work of ‘identity’ to make sense of the meaning of race in a period in which the category is legally unhinged and subject to multiple discursive formations”.

Hostility in the form of inter-ethnic abuse involved name-calling and fights in all three schools. Pupils’ reactions to name-calling were disclosed during interviews, where there was a wide range of expressed feelings ranging from anger to hurt or resignation. In most cases, name-calling was related to race. The findings of this study are in agreement with the studies conducted by Verma, Zek and Skinner (1994) and Cole (1990). Apart from verbal abuse, physical abuse was also common among the white and Indian boys in Esiphumelelayo and my study highlights the racial problems that exist in the three schools.

10.3 Methodological Issues

This thesis attempted to present the experience of teachers and pupils in historically white schools faced with racially/culturally diverse classrooms in a democratic South Africa. The results of this research may not be generalisable to other settings especially if the importance of the context is considered (Patton, 2002; Neuman, 2000; Cresswell, 1998; Merriam, 1997; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Every school has its own unique circumstances and history, and operates in a particular cultural environment. However, despite the fact that this study may not be generalisable the findings illuminate crucial issues which require attention, for example teachers’ need for INSET to address racial diversity in their classrooms. The fact that teachers are unaware of the implications attached to their choice of the “colour-blind” approach
provides evidence for the need of a postmodernist version of multicultural education or perhaps even anti-racist education to be presented as INSET. Teachers need to be made aware of the dangers of stereotyping, the discourse of blame and deficit discourse, albeit inadvertent.

To conduct a study of this nature it is pertinent to take into account the complexities that any researcher would encounter. Racially integrated classes are still in their infancy and abound with numerous problems. Multicultural Education and anti-racist education provide examples of strategies that our teachers and policy-makers may draw upon to manage racially diverse classrooms in South Africa. Considering that South Africa is now a member of the global society, the onus rests upon teachers to inculcate the necessary values and skills for our pupils to be able to take their rightful places in this global arena. Since the global conception of multicultural education involves more than just a knowledge of other cultures, teachers would need to understand that multicultural education involves transformation, that provides equal opportunities for all their pupils. While taking cognisance of politics, cultural diversity, ethnicity and gender issues. However, despite research in the UK, the USA, Australia and Canada having been conducted in the previous century, the debate around multicultural education and anti-racist education continues.

10.4 Contribution to the Other Research in the Field

An examination of the accounts of other researchers on the topic of teaching in racially diverse classrooms is valuable as far as a comparison of conclusions is concerned. The study conducted by Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) in the UK, Dolby’s study (2001) and Soudien’s study (1998) conducted in South Africa have particular significance for this study. This study has drawn on the work of Verma, Zek and Skinner (1994) on integrated classrooms, and it can be concluded that the outcomes of this study, in general, support many of their findings on what they refer to as “harmony and hostility”. To reiterate Verma, Zek and Skinner’s (1994) study examined in-depth inter-ethnic conflict in its relationship to racial prejudice and discrimination however, what their study did not explore was cultural deficit discourse and the concept of power and power relations in the classroom. My study explored cultural deficit to a certain extent but despite highlighting specific instances of power-relations also failed to address this issue of power adequately.
What this study has achieved is its observations of both teachers’ and pupils’ reaction to change in historically white former Model C school. The history of segregated education in South Africa differs profoundly from the history of education in both the UK and USA, but the discourse of racism, prejudice and discrimination is similar anywhere in the world. This study, by presenting a comprehensive analysis of the operation of racially integrated classrooms, contributes significantly to the current literature on South African education and racial integration.

In addition to a thorough investigation into both the teachers’ and pupils’ perceptions of racially integrated classrooms, this study also investigated language and method used by teachers and their relation to the racially diverse classroom. Hence, it was possible to clarify how the concepts of cultural deficit, colour-blindness, blame and assimilation interact with notions of power. These notions were evident during the previous century when extensive research was conducted into education of the minorities in the UK and the USA (see Chapters Two and Three). This study extends the South African literature in that it focuses specifically on historically white former Model C Schools.

The findings of this research show how inter-cultural relations according to some teachers have improved between African and white pupils as was the case for example in Zama and Esiphumelelayo. Teachers reported a significant shift – from harsh and tense relationships among pupils to tolerant and less tense when the study was conducted.

A key contribution to this study was the comprehensive analysis of the teachers and pupils’ comments. However, a number of questions emerge. These include, for example: Have teachers’ experiences changed since this study commenced? Have schools introduced INSET in the area of teaching racially integrated classes? What has been the long-term impact of teaching in racially diverse classes? Has assimilation begun to work the way teachers would like it to? What are pupils’ experiences in these Historically White former Model C Schools? Is racism still as rife as it was when this study was conducted? How has racism impacted on the school population? Has the ethos of the schools changed? Future research on teaching in racially diverse classrooms may provide answers to some of these questions.
10.5 The Role of the Department of Education

An outcome to a module in the Teachers’ Diploma on teaching in culturally diverse classrooms could be a teacher’s ability to work and maintain a congenial atmosphere, where every individual irrespective of race, creed, culture, gender is made to feel a valuable member of society. It will also be valuable to offer INSET Programmes to teachers, whether they are in mono-race or multiracial schools.

An extract from the preamble to the Schools Act 1996 reads:

“Whereas this country requires a new national system for schools which redress past injustices in educational provision provide an education of progressively high quality for all pupils and in so doing lays a strong foundation for the development of all our people’s talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance”.

(Government Gazette No. 17579, 1996)

From this extract is evident that the teachers will be required to effect these changes and will need expertise and training to achieve the desired results as set out in the Education Act. This is further motivation for the investigation of teachers’ contributions and commitment to racial diversity in their classroom.

In order to implement the stipulation of the Schools Act of 1996 it is necessary to have a national policy on racial integration and equal opportunities in schools. In the UK the LEAs provided schools with policies on equal opportunities and anti-racist/multicultural education. However, these policies were criticised by teachers because they lacked suggested strategies for implementation. Some teachers found these policies to be “platitudinous and superficial”, while others found them to be “overstated and possibly alienating” (Verma, Zek and Skinner, 1994, p. 107). Schools also had policies in place but in their study of nine schools Verma, Zek and Skinner (1994) found that they differed markedly with regard to formulation, development and specificity. A greater investment by the DoE in support of a form of ‘integrated education’ would be welcome by all educationists.

10.6 Implications of the Study for Racially Diverse Classrooms

The findings in this study illuminate various areas in racially integrated classrooms that need to be addressed. It should be a teacher’s aim to attempt to know his/her pupils well. However, the more
heterogeneous the school population the more significant it is that the general characteristics of the various cultural groups are understood. This understanding should surpass generalised characteristics and proceed to the manifold patterns of cultural development and religious practices within the diverse racial population in historically white former Model C schools. To be familiar with the statistics of the number of black, Indian, Coloured and Chinese pupils in the schools does not assist teachers to value the particular ways in which any individual African or Indian pupil perceives his/her experience of racism.

In order for inter-cultural relationships to improve, the schools should be determined to implement policies on inter-racial relationships and should be unfailing in their attempts to explain and persuade members of staff to work towards implementing the policy. Members of staff should be encouraged to feel that they are all equally responsible for what happens in the school. If this is not the case, then the result might be a superficial achievement of working inter-racial relationships. True inter-racial relationships can only be achieved if teachers are committed to change and subscribe fully to the legislation by carefully monitoring and reviewing their progress. Schools should seek to recruit, retain and promote teachers from racially diverse backgrounds and recruit teachers on merit, no matter what their racial/cultural background. Principals reported that black parents do not want their children taught by black teachers. Perhaps the black parents’ insistence has given principals the opportunity to retain a predominantly white staff. However, principals should not be intimidated by black parents, and should be more assertive in their decisions to employ African teachers.

It is the responsibility of schools to formulate a clear policy on racial diversity, and should emphasise their determination to counter the incidence of inter-racial abuse within the policy. Senior management should constantly display its commitment to the policy. The policy should include distinct procedures and should involve class teachers, parents and the community. The contexts in which inter-racial conflicts occur are frequently situations in which hostility, insults and hurtful, derogatory remarks and jokes directed at certain people. A written statement, banning this type of behaviour, agreed to by all involved and validated by the schools’ governing body, is a necessity.

The following quotation taken has relevance.
For if we do not attend to the valuable differences that exist... if we do not begin to understand all the forces that tear at us to weaken who we are then we will live a life of fractured selves and become a defeated nation. It is only through recognition of our differences and our shared humanity that we can move forward... Our educational programs need to move forward, recognize, honour and utilize these differences. (Liston and Zeichner 1995, p. 54)

10.7 The Future of Racially Diverse Classrooms

One of the greatest concerns in teaching in culturally diverse classrooms should be the manner in which we can create educational settings that take cognisance of both the shared and diverse understandings of pupils from racially diverse backgrounds. There are no simple solutions to the issues raised by teaching in racially/culturally diverse classrooms. Numerous questions have been raised and teachers seek answers to these questions. A burning issue among most of the teachers interviewed is ‘How do we cope in these classrooms?’ In addition, many asked what they could do about the noise levels and behaviour. There are no simple solutions, and there are many complications. However, as teachers we should strive towards providing an education that will broaden our pupils’ horizons and equip them to be knowledgeable upright citizens who can take their place in society. Education has an effect on each individual and the sum total of these effects could affect the wider society. Yet, we should not lose sight of the fact that some of the problems that teachers face are deeply rooted, and would require changes, which many are unable or unwilling to deal with. Liston and Zeichner (1996) assert that racism is a permanent feature of the American society. There are many in South Africa who will agree that this is also the case here. What Liston and Zeichner (1996) recommend for teachers in the USA is realism and hope and perhaps we can hold on to that as well. West (1993) and Hooks (1994 in Liston and Zeichner, 1996) recommend love and care, in their opinion teachers and teaching need love, caring, compassion, engagement and commitment.

In spite of various negative remarks that teachers made during the interviews some teachers were optimistic about multicultural education. If teachers learn to use racial diversity as a tool to improve, their teaching there should be fewer frustrated and happier teachers. However, the teachers may say ‘it’s easier said than done’. In conclusion, I quote at length from an address by Vitto Perrone (1989, p. 6):
Valuing diversity in our schools calls for the beginning with the child-acting on the assumptions that learning is a personal matter, varies for different children, proceeds best when children are actively engaged in their own learning, takes place in a variety of environments in and out of school, and is enhanced in a supportive setting where children are taken seriously. To act on these would mean challenging the ways most teachers, schools and classrooms now function. Normative orientations, which include predetermined expectations for children at prescribed ages, for example, would begin to collapse, as would most standardised testing. A diversity of options for learning would be available. As most teachers have come to understand the opportunities for successful experience and increasing levels of self-esteem are related to the range of options available to children.

10.8 Last Words

I began this study with great enthusiasm realising that “the road would be long with many a winding path” (apologies to the Hollies) but I did not anticipate the ditches, hurdles, and sometimes craters and mountains that I would encounter en route to my goal. How I would trip, fall, bruise my ego and lose my self-esteem along the journey, but I have arrived and this was indeed an illuminating experience for me in that it has presented new vistas and equipped me with the skills to engage in qualitative inquiry confidently. Apart from the academic aspect what was most enlightening was the ability to engage with teachers and pupils and gain their confidence that they were prepared to disclose their emotions and experiences honestly.

However, from the experience gained in conducting this study I believe I would have approached it differently. Perhaps I would initially have used a survey as my baseline investigation to ascertain teachers’ and pupils’ perceptions of racially diverse classrooms. I would then have structured my study on the results of this initial investigation and proceeded to conduct in–depth ethnographic observations at each of the three schools as well as at three schools in another district over a much longer period. I believe that the ethnographic observations would have been enhanced by in–depth face–to–face interviews and focus group interviews with teachers and pupils.

To a certain extent I concur with Ladson–Billings (1995) since my location of myself as black could perhaps work against me in that I may be perceived as being biased because of my interest in the future of black people in this country. Consequently, I have sought theoretical underpinnings that substantiate my claims.

In conclusion, I echo the sentiments of Mama (1995, p. 86):
I make no claims about the use I made of the material at my disposal being the best or only use that could be made. On the contrary, I regard the material as having a potentially infinitive number of possible interpretations and uses to which it could be put.