

## **CHAPTER 4**

# **THE METAMORPHOSIS OF A DESEGREGATING SCHOOL**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter, Chapter 3, dealt with the research paradigm, the research design and the rationale for the methodology followed during the course of the research process. The research design was explained in conjunction with the strategies used. It was also in Chapter 3 that a detailed explanation of the choice of school and the sampling of participants in this research project was provided. Since ‘context’ forms a significant component of case study and ethnographic research (Yin, 2004: 23; Creswell, 2002: 56), it is my contention that to fully understand the issue of diversity and integration that is addressed in this study, an overview of the context is indispensable. This chapter focuses, mainly, on a discussion of the process of desegregation as it unfolded at Van Den Berg High School - with regard to challenges and obstacles by scrutinising specific incidents at school, the atmosphere nationally and within the school when desegregation started.

### **4.2 THE NATIONAL CONTEXT**

Four decades of institutionalised segregation and racism in South Africa have not only isolated the different population groups, but they have also limited opportunities for interpersonal contact between black and white people - both in the social and cultural spheres of society and in schools. This limiting of opportunities for the spontaneous development of interpersonal relations among learners from diverse racial backgrounds - as well as limiting access to knowledge about each other through first-hand acquaintance across ethnic and racial boundaries - had at least two consequences: namely, individual/group ignorance about the way some groups lived and it provided a fertile climate for the creation of myths about the ‘others’. While

barely a decade ago the primary preoccupation of the post-apartheid education department was to ensure that black learners could access formerly Whites-only public schools, attention has now shifted to achieving the ‘full integration’ of the learners who are enrolled in such desegregated schools.

The adoption of the *South African Schools Act, Act No 84 of 1996* marked the end of the official existence of race-based schools in the country. Schools in rural and disadvantaged areas were not affected much by this process - in terms of receiving learners from other race groups - since the migration was, mostly, of black learners from township schools to former Whites-only schools and - in some cases - former Coloureds-only and Indians-only schools. In the cities, schools which were originally designated for white learners only - in contrast to coloured and Indian schools - received more learners from other racial groups. This was a reversal of the social pattern that was put in place by the designation of the separate residential areas for different racial groups in South Africa which - since 1950 - was legalised in terms of the *Group Areas Act, Act No. 41 of 1950*.

### **4.3 THE SCHOOL CONTEXT**

The narrative developed here shows the process of desegregation as it unfolded at the selected school. I use the metaphor of the life-cycle of the butterfly in relating the stages of the desegregation process at Van Den Berg High School. The narrative, therefore, depicts the life-cycle of Van Den Berg’s desegregation process - from its crawling egg and larva stages in the years from 1992 to 1999 and up to the time this research was carried out in 2004 which is the ‘current full-grown stage’ in the narrative. Although some events before 1996 influenced what happened afterwards, for the purpose of this inquiry the narrative, nevertheless, concentrates on the period 1996 onwards. The reason for this is because Van Den Berg High School was, then, a desegregated school and no longer a single medium, single race school. Perhaps, I need to point out at this stage of the narrative that I was confronted by two main challenges during the process of data analysis: Firstly, I had to translate the data from Afrikaans – the language in which the majority of the school documents are written - into English. Therefore, whenever I quote from the documents in this chapter, the

quotations must be understood to be the translated versions of their original form. The original is, however, given as a footnote. Despite this, all the interviews - except for one with an Afrikaans-speaking learner - were in English. In some cases African learners and parents used their first language to highlight some points. Wherever I needed to quote from that type of conversation, I did that in English and gave the original in a footnote.

The second challenge - as Nind *et al.* (2004:ix) ascertained - was seeing through the layers of what I found in that school in terms of the official school culture; the learner's culture; the classroom culture; the playground culture; and the sub-cultures related to class, ethnicity, race, colour, gender, sexuality, etc. For this reason, I provide raw data - through description - in the form of stories that the learners told. The stories are interpreted by putting each experience in context and by indicating how each reflects on desegregation and integration in the South African context - and at this school, specifically. A strong emphasis is given to the accounts of the participants (Walford, 2001:5) and their understanding of racial diversity in the analysis. The voices of the 16 learners in this ethnography are given first priority and are analysed in-depth - thus, forming the main findings of this research. These voices are, nevertheless, mirrored by the theoretical base of the Stanford University Educators conceptualisation of diversity, namely, *structural diversity*, *diversity related initiatives* and *diverse interactions*, which are further closely related to one another.

#### **4.3.1 The egg stage**

Van Den Berg High School was an Afrikaans medium Whites-only high school before the new democratic order. From 1996 the school began to change its language policy in order to accommodate learners who were, specifically, from an English background. As has already been alluded to in this study, previous studies on desegregation found that most schools were vociferous in their opposition to the idea of school desegregation - as advocated by the new Department of Education in terms of the *South African Schools Act* (Vally & Dalamba, 1999:87). As Naidoo puts it, there were spates of racially motivated violence at schools, such as Drakensberg Secondary School in Estcourt, Shallcross Secondary School, Burnhood High School in Sydenham and Vryburg Primary School and Potgietersrus Primary School in

Limpopo (Naidoo, 1999: 3; The Cape Times, 1999: 8).

With the parent community of Van Den Berg High School being largely Whites and Afrikaans-speaking, it could be expected that these profound changes - which were sure to affect the future of their children - could not be accepted without a certain measure of coercion. In fact, it needs to be emphasised that Van Den Berg High School did not embrace desegregation out of choice. On the contrary, it had no option but to comply - both with the Constitution and with the legislation that governed education from 1996. Besides these, other structural factors played themselves out and influenced the decision-making process at the school. For example, the school was already losing both staff and learners to other schools - mainly because of its own history (Principal.1st interview.txt -1:76 [120:132]).

It may be said that - like other schools at the time - Van Den Berg High School was compelled by government policy and other factors beyond its control to desegregate and, eventually, to embrace integration. Hence, the narrative that is presented in this chapter seeks to demonstrate how far the school had come in terms of shifting from its rigid Afrikaans Whites-only past - as presented by the school documents - to its 'integrated' form - as told by the learners in the interviews and my personal observations in the course of this research.

During the first interview with the principal of the school, he alluded to the factors that led to the school's loss of learners and teachers as, mostly, the actions of his predecessor when he said: "He, basically, turned the school into a political field and many parents were unhappy about that and as a result took their children out of the school" (Principal.1st interview.txt -1:56 [98:100]). The number of learners in the school has always been the concern of the school community, in general, and the School Governing Body, in particular - as is evidenced by the various agendas of its meetings (SGB Minutes, 8 September 1994). This was more so because the number of learners in the school determined the number of teachers the education department would allocate for the following year - as well as the number of teachers the school stood to lose to other schools should the lack of number of learners prescribed by the department warrant it.

As could be expected, the first approach to the problem involved attempts by all stakeholders to fill the school with learners - without tampering with its racial make up. The challenge, therefore, was to recruit not only white but also Afrikaans-speaking learners. To realise this objective, a vigorous marketing strategy was embarked upon - targeting, specifically, the white Afrikaans medium primary schools in the neighbourhood, but with ever-diminishing success. The following year the education department transferred excess teachers from Van Den Berg High School to schools where their services were needed the most (Principal.1st interview.txt -1:56 [103:104]).

The School Governing Body eventually accepted that their strategy was not effective and that new strategies had to be devised to save the school from complete closure - should the number of learners continue to decline. The next move involved changing and strengthening their marketing strategy to include the advertising of the school in the print media and to include the coloured Afrikaans primary schools in their target population. Closely analysed, it is clear that the inclusion of the coloured group was informed by the desire to preserve the school's Afrikaans character. However, what was even more disheartening was the fact that - except for only three - most of the coloured learners who took enrolment forms from the school did not return them; of those who did return the forms, none enrolled at the school in the following year (SJ1: 123).

Consequently, the education department continued to transfer excess teachers to other schools as the number of learners justified this. Indeed, this continuous loss of staff was viewed with deep concern by the School Governing Body that resolved to stop at nothing to see the situation reversed. One of their first strategies involved a decision to change the language policy of the school from Afrikaans to both Afrikaans and English - so that the school could also be marketed to the white English-speaking learners at the neighbouring English primary schools (Principal.1st interview.txt - 1:59 [109:109]). This strategy did not work very well in the beginning because of the history of the school and the reputation that the school had among the white English-speaking parents. As Vernon<sup>19</sup> put it:

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19 A pseudonym given to one of the learners in the sample

A lot of the English-speaking people did not want to send their kids here because they were scared of this culture of Afrikaans (Vernon, txt - 2:126 [252:253]).

From the above statement, there is no doubt that what happened at the school during the years 1992-1993 - as pointed out in Chapter 3 - had adverse affects on the school's image in subsequent years. The principal concedes this fact when he said: "Some parents were unhappy about it and they started removing their children from the school as a result of which the number of learners at the school declined" (Principal.1st interview.txt - 1:25 [54:56]).

Subsequently, in an effort to remedy the situation, the school governing body decided to market the school in the neighbouring black townships of Mamelodi, Atteridgeville and Soshanguve. They opted for this approach because Groot High School<sup>20</sup> - a neighbouring Afrikaans medium high school - had already used this strategy from 1995 to great effect. Thus, taking into account the apparent success of the strategy at Groot High, it was thought advisable to implement the same strategy at Van Den Berg High School - but all in vain. The reason for the failure was that - for the majority of the parents - the schools 'whiteness' and its 'Afrikaans' culture could not be preserved under conditions of integration with other races. Notwithstanding this concern, however, the decision to admit black learners was implemented and as a prelude to their admission it was considered even more imperative that the school's language policy should be modified. This approach seemed to be effective because the school clearly demonstrated its commitment to desegregation - as Vernon so explicitly explained:

Our school showed the public that it is both English and Afrikaans and, in fact, now it is even more English than Afrikaans (Vernon.txt - 2:127 [253:255]).

Desegregation was forced on an unwilling community more by structural, policy and logistical imperatives than by voluntary actions. This was the school's first move towards what the Stanford Educators would refer as structural diversity. Although the community aspired to keep the school white and Afrikaans, Vernon's statement supports the fact that the school did not succeed. In the following discussion, they had

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20 A pseudonym given to a neighbouring former Afrikaans high school near Van den Berg

to market the school to white English-speakers. Ironically, one could have expected the Van Den Berg Governing Body to market the school to white English-speakers first - before they marketed it to coloured Afrikaans-speakers. It is clear from their marketing strategy that they would have settled for an Afrikaans school with coloured learners rather than a parallel medium school full of white learners who spoke the two languages.

The preservation of the Afrikaans language and its rivalry with the English language has a long history - from the time the British Settlers arrived at the Cape in 1820 and after the Afrikaans people of Dutch origin mobilised in favour of Afrikaner nationalism. The Afrikaners had always competed with the English people for superiority. As the English-speaking South Africans have always identified themselves with Britain this led to the Afrikaner accusing them of being 'rooinekke'<sup>21</sup> whose allegiance to the British Empire prevented them from identifying with South Africa (Pretoria News, 1939: 11).

To show that the Afrikaans-speaking, white people would rather have ties with the coloured Afrikaans-speaking people than with the white English-speaking people is evident in how they used to refer to them. Amongst other connotations, the English-speaking people would be referred to as 'The British'<sup>22</sup> or 'The English'<sup>23</sup>. In his inaugural address at the University of South Africa, entitled *An unknown people: Writing a biography of white English-speaking South Africans*, Lambert (2006:21) provided - what he called - "a possibly apocryphal story which illustrates this hostility" between the two language groups of white people. "On being told that the English had lost 3 wickets for 42 runs in a cricket test match against South Africa, the then South African Prime Minister, John Vorster asked, 'their English or our English?'"<sup>24</sup>

Langehoven, a celebrated South African author, portrayed the competition between the Afrikaners and the English and their attitude towards the English when he said that to Afrikaners the word, 'English', includes "whatever the general term British

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21 rednecks

22. Die Britte

23. Die Engelse

24. Hulle Engelse of ons Engelse?

includes... to us they are all English as their speech is English” (1979: 8). I do not think that the Van Den Berg community would, willy-nilly, have included the language of domination in their school because - as far as the Afrikaners were concerned - it was a common accusation that English men and, particularly, women accorded little respect for - or recognition of - Afrikaner aspirations and they were not even prepared to learn their language (Langenhoven, nd: 12). It seems that some English-speaking South Africans admit to what the Afrikaans people accused them of. Brookes (1977: 14) admits to being one of those English-speaking South Africans who took “uncritically and even unconsciously, that position of superiority and were infuriated by English arrogance and their failure to comprehend Afrikaner bitterness at events such as the destruction of the republican independence.” Brink (1996: 110) wrote an analysis of Afrikaner anger towards English arrogance in *Reinventing a continent: Writing and politics in South Africa, 1982-1995*. I refer to this uneasiness at this point of the story so that it should be remembered and be appreciated to understand where the thinking of the time came from. The next section explores the next stage of the life-cycle.

#### **4.3.2 The larva stage**

This section of the chapter draws attention to the history of the school - as recorded in the school documents from the time the school enrolled its first black learners. The chapter seeks to demonstrate that integration had been a continuous process and, therefore, at no stage could anyone have claimed that it was complete. Desegregation was not an easy process for any of the affected schools - and Van Den Berg High School was not an exception. I allude to events that took place at the school immediately after the learners from different racial groups came into contact with one another in a school situation for the first time.

Attention is drawn to the way the parent community and the learners in the school responded to the whole process. Of course, the ideal situation would be to let the data ‘speak for itself’. However, as Lather and Smithies (1997:5) suggest, “there is no such thing as ‘objective’ data.” Henning *et al.* (2003: 4) note that objectivity can be seen as allowing the voice of the participant to be heard in as clear and undistorted a manner as possible. Klaas, on the other hand, talks about critical reflection of oneself on a continuous basis - especially when one studies a phenomenon that has once affected

her life (Klaas, 2004:71).

According to Vernon's statement - quoted above - the success of the school in attracting learners from other language groups, particularly from black communities, could be ascribed to its flexibility in terms of its language policy. In 1996, for instance, the school enrolled its first black learners. As a result the overall number of learners improved significantly. However, there could be no reason for complacency because the school was not yet full – as had been anticipated. According to the principal, it was for this reason that they had to explain to the Director of Education in their region why the school was not full (Principal, 1<sup>st</sup> interview.txt 1: 62 [112-114]). On 03 August 1997 the school celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary (SJ1: 123), boasting sufficient number of learners - at least enough for them - to justify keeping the number of educators who were paid for by the state at the time.

Subsequently, the school governing body undertook to work differently and to improve their situation in the following year (Principal.1st interview.txt - 1:56 [103:104]). The following year the school strengthened its marketing strategies and started a serious recruitment of learners from neighbouring English primary schools. These English primary schools already had many African, Indian and coloured learners, but for various reasons most of the parents were reluctant to send their children to Van Den Berg High School (Principal.1st interview.txt - 1:26 [57:58]).

In spite of their initial reluctance, a few white English-speaking parents braved the situation and sent their children to this school. These parents were convinced by the new marketing strategy and, indeed, the success stories of those learners in the English classes no doubt accounted for the eventual influx of English-speaking learners to Van Den Berg High School (SJ2: 45). According to the principal, most of these newcomers started featuring in the top ten of the school's academic achievement list in each grade (SNL<sup>25</sup>, September, 1999: 2). Vernon attested to this in the following statement:

Precisely because of the foregoing, many learners left the English high schools nearby, after their Grade 8, and came to join Van Den Berg for their

Grade 9 in subsequent years. Parents who were still sceptical to the whole idea of sending their children to this school were now happy and willing to do so (Vernon.txt - 2:126 [252:253]).

The importance of the change in the language policy - as the main contributing factor in this regard - cannot be overemphasised. According to the principal, “the English parents were now convinced that their children were not taught in Afrikaans as they had previously feared” (Principal. 1st interview.txt-1: 26 [60-62]). Hall *et al* (2000: 69) sums up this argument when he says that “in the post-colonial world it is necessary for peoples to rethink their identities, to take into account exclusivity and cultural diversity.”

**Table 4.1: The growth in learners’ enrolment, 1995-1998 and 2004**

<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2004</b>
Afrikaans: 432	Afrikaans: 454	Afrikaans: 495	Afrikaans: 514	Afrikaans: 391
English: 0	English: 64	English: 143	English: 224	English: 452
<b>432</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>768</b>	<b>843</b>

From the above table, it is clear that the number of learners increased every year - from 1995 to 1998. Perhaps, even more notable was the growth in the number of English-speaking learners – primarily, because the school had changed its language policy to accommodate learners other than Afrikaans language speakers (SJ1: 213). During January 2006 there were already more English learners than the Afrikaans learners (2005 School EMIS data). Vernon also noted:

But because of the fact that our school showed the public that we are both English and Afrikaans and actually we are now more English than Afrikaans (Vernon.txt - 2:127 [253:255]).

As a member of the Learner Representative Council, Vernon sits on management committees that decide the future of the school. He knows that the numbers of the learners being taught in English are, presently, more than those that learn in Afrikaans.

The Stanford University educators - with James Banks as their co-ordinator - refer to diversity-related initiatives. For a school to succeed in its diversity, it has to take initiatives that will include the interests of all the learners it serves. This move to change the language policy is in line with what Banks and Irvine refer to as modifying the teaching and learning strategies so that learners from different racial, cultural, language, and social class groups will experience equal status in the culture and life of the school (Banks, 2001; Irvine, 2003). This move is also in line with the second dimension of diversity – *diversity-related initiatives* (Hurtando *et al.*, 1998, 1999, 2002).

The changing of the language policy to include English-speaking learners did not seem like assimilationist in nature. It does not look as if the school intended to let the English learners ‘melt into the Afrikaans pot.’ The learners were given the freedom to start their own cultural activities within the school - something which did not exist before. These cultural activities included English Public Speaking and the English Forum. The school newsletter was written in both English and Afrikaans - not translated from Afrikaans to English. Within the same letter, both languages were used on an equitable basis.

The reality of the situation at the school was that the same teacher had to teach the same lesson twice - once in the Afrikaans class and then again in the English class. The result was that, initially, most teachers were frustrated by this move because they had to teach in the two languages and not all of them were, completely, competent to do so. Some of the English first language learners developed language problems during the lessons. The example that Marelise - one of the Grade 11 pupils - gave is the use of the word *except* instead of *accept* and vice-versa. Teachers who were used to teaching in Afrikaans only, were expected to become bilingual. Although the teachers may not have been competent to teach in both languages, they accepted the challenge. This makes one think that their attitude was conducive to the changing environment of the school. It is possible that some accepted the situation because they were aware that they did not have a choice. However, the fact that they were willing to ‘give it a go’ is remarkable.

### 4.3.3 The pupa stage

It is important to mention that the pupa stage of the school's desegregation process was marred by racial intolerance and racial conflicts. Analysed very closely, there can be no doubt that this development has - in many ways - served to vindicate the views of the segregationists – particularly the man after whom the school is named when he justified racial segregation in education in the early 1950s.

During the 1950s the main argument was that different race groups could not coexist in - let alone attend – the same schools without conflict and tension; hence, the idea of apartheid and the subsequent racial polarisation of society - in both social and cultural spheres of life. This falls in line with the recommendations of the Eiselen Commission on Native Education which emphasised the impossibility of co-existence – as is evident in the following quote:

The formulation of the principles and aims of education for Natives, as an independent race, in which their past and present, their inherent racial qualities, their distinctive characteristics and aptitude, and their needs under ever-changing conditions are taken into consideration.

It was after these types of recommendations that the Nationalist government passed the *Bantu Education Act, Act No 47 of 1953* (Sehoole, 2005: 13). From information available in the school records, such as the school journals; letters from members of the parent community; and newspaper clippings in the school file, it appears that among other impediments to integration in this school was the attitude of some of the parent members of the school community towards other race groups. For example, one parent who expressed concern about people roaming around the school fields in the afternoons couched this concern in racist language by arguing that

It has come to be unsafe for me to train my daughter as an athlete using the school fields. I suggest that a solution could be raising funds to build a big and strong wall to keep the *black people* out (author's emphasis) (Letter pasted in the SJ1: 190).<sup>26</sup>

Although on the surface, this statement may seem to have little bearing on the issue of

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26 Dit is nou nie veilig om my atletieke dogter

integration in the school, there can be no doubt that coming - as it did - from a parent of one of the learners at Van Den Berg High School, the tone of the letter is a vivid illustration of the kind of attitude towards other races that some white learners were still exposed to at home during the early stages of desegregation. For all practical purposes, such attitudes and influences would have a significant effect on the way the child made - or failed to make - friendships with other learners across the colour divide and, thus, the work of the integrationists would remain undone in the circumstances.

Another incident - showing a similar form of racial intolerance to which some white learners were still exposed to by their families - merits attention to underscore the point. In this particular case, a professor at a local university was complaining about

...the time wasted at every School Governing Body meeting discussing the reasons why we should admit learners from other races while my child's bicycle was stolen<sup>27</sup> (Letter pasted in SJ1: 182).

Without saying that the few black learners - who had already been admitted to the school at the time - were responsible for the disappearance of his child's bicycle, the tone of the letter clearly leads one to that conclusion. The following extract from the principal's report during the same period supports my argument

Theft has become a real problem amongst the English learners<sup>28</sup>. The school will have to quickly formulate its stand point on that issue. Some aspects of the Hotel School are affected because of that and, therefore, attention must be paid to that area as well<sup>29</sup> (Principal's report, 23 November 1998).

Another parent wrote a letter to the school and the following is an extract from that letter.

On 3 November 2001, I confronted a black person who was on the school premises and was washing his clothes in the school laundry basin. This man told me that he works at Number 14 and as far as he was concerned the school property was public property! I cannot understand how these black

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27 Die tyd word gemors

28. English learners - black and white English-speaking learners/the English stream of the school.

29. *Diefstal is besig om werklik 'n groot probleem onder veral die Engelse leerlinge te word. Die skool sal dringend 'n beleid standpunt hieroor moet formuleer. Sekere aspekte van die hotelskool se beleid in die verband moet ook aandag kry.*

people think<sup>30</sup>.

These examples of parents' attitudes towards blacks - in and around Van Den Berg High School - tell us that integration is a process which was not, immediately, embraced by everyone - least of all the parent community and, as this study will show, not even by the school itself. It was foisted on the school by both legislation governing education in South Africa namely, The South African Schools Act and the Constitution and by the progressive approach of the headmaster, both of which are discussed in the next chapter.

I argue that change was foisted on the school because - even when the education department tried to use the school as a venue for the training of school governing bodies of mostly black schools in the townships - the school refused on the grounds that it had its own systems in place and could not understand why its premises should be used for training. Admittedly, speculation has no place in matters of research and although one's conclusions - in this regard - could, at best, be dismissed as sheer speculation, it could, nonetheless, be concluded that this refusal had more to do with race in that the school governing bodies - who were to be trained - were from schools in the black townships.

Closely analysed, the same reasons that informed the school's refusal to be used as a venue for the training sessions of school governing bodies also informed the school's refusal to attend the department-organised training sessions on diversity, conflict resolution and other issues. The following statement clearly illustrates this:

I, hereby, confirm - with reference to our telephonic conversation of 18 September 1997 - that the schools in our group request to be excused from the training sessions on developing a school's mission and vision statements and legislation. The said schools have already progressed far with this matter or have completed it<sup>31</sup> (SJ1: 221).

Because issues of diversity were critical during this time and formed the basis of the

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31. *Ek bevestig hiermee na aanleiding van ons telefoniese gesprek van 18 September 1997 dat die skole in ons groepering versoek het om nie die opleidingsessies met betrekking tot die opstel van 'n visie en missie en die grondwet by te woon nie. Die betrokke skole het almal reeds baie ver hiermee gevorder het of dit reeds afgehandel.*

discussion at these meetings, it is not hard to conclude that schools that did not support the direction that the education department was taking at the time demonstrated this by, literally, voting with their feet. In this particular case, the school would not attend any meeting which sought to encourage desegregation and integration. For example, although the school had already undertaken to integrate the teaching staff, at the time of this research no such integration had taken place. The teaching staff was still 100% white (School Emis Data, 2004). This integration of the teaching staff was, indeed, critical to the whole process; for the effective desegregation of the school to take place, this needed to be all round and not limited to the learners only (Nkomo *et al.*, 2006:29). The lack of integration of the staff was also caused by structural issues.

I happen to identify, personally, with the reasons why most of the white schools did not include black staff members in their schools. I was the first African teacher at a former white English primary school which had desegregated. This primary school advertised a post for a Northern Sotho<sup>32</sup> teacher in 1998 - to begin work in 1999. After three sets of interviews, I obtained the position. I later learnt from the principal that it was because of my 'good education' and experience, coupled with my personality and enthusiasm that I got the position. The position was a six month contract – "to be renewed if my work was deemed satisfactory." I only worked 3 days a week compared to the 5-day week of all the white teachers.

My contract was extended to a year. According to the principal, they "had never seen a black teacher with my competence." I was teaching my first language to people who did not know it. How was my competence being measured? Although I think that this phenomenon of being the only black teacher amongst 37 white staff members warrants a study of the experiences on its own, I think it is at this point that I have to mention how the school treated me from the beginning - when I joined them - and how I was treated five years later when I left to carry out this study. This is relevant for my study because I think it is equivalent to how Van Den Berg High School experienced desegregation in the beginning and how it unfolded until it reached its present stage.

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32. One of the indigenous languages of South Africa - spoken, mostly, in the northern parts of the country. It is also referred to as Sepedi.

My first day at work at the primary school was hailed with a ‘press conference’ of local newspapers. I was interviewed and photos of me and the Grade 7 learners that I would teach were taken. In the afternoon when I went home, the whole bus of people bought the late final of Pretoria News<sup>33</sup> and everyone wanted me to see my photo - with the white learners – that had made the front page! It was a very big issue for the school to have had the courage to hire a black teacher. I was ‘privileged’ to have obtained a post in a white school. The headlines read: “Lambrina<sup>34</sup> Primary School Hires the First Black Teacher.”

Except for the Doctor of Music - who was retired and was paid by the School Governing Body - I was the only teacher in the whole school who held an Honours degree and - a year later - a Master’s Degree. “This is the calibre of teachers we need at our school to teach our children” the chairperson of the School Governing Body told the parents at a meeting when I was introduced. To my surprise, the other white teachers - who were hired at the same time - only had undergraduate degrees and one only had an old college diploma. Things started to warm up when I had to interact with the educators, the learners and the parents. In short, things improved with time. In the beginning it was bad but the staff, the learners and the parents gradually changed their attitudes as they got to know me. Many apologised for their horrible behaviour before they got to know me and some became my very close friends. The younger staff members regarded me as their role model and confided in me regarding most of the things that they could not share with the older white teachers. In a subsequent study of the experiences of black teachers among white-only teachers in desegregated schools, and vice versa I will reflect more on this.

Something that I noted was the attitude of black parents towards their children’s learning of Northern Sotho. Ndimande (2006) also alludes to this attitude in his paper where most of the parents that were interviewed did not favour the idea that their children should also be taught an African language. They argued that they wanted their children to learn English. I was faced with many challenges - especially from

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33 The name of the local newspaper

34 A pseudonym for the English primary school that hired me as their first black teacher in 1999.

black parents whose first language was not Northern Sotho. The reason the school chose Northern Sotho to be taught was because the black people in the area of the school spoke that language.

#### **4.4 NOTABLE INCIDENTS OF RACIAL TENSION AT VAN DEN BERG HIGH SCHOOL**

The following sections contain examples of incidents of racial tension at Van Den Berg High School.

##### **4.4.1 The rugby match incident**

School integration presupposes integration in school sports. However, in most cases, first encounter during these years usually ended up in racial conflict. For example, on 14 May 1997 a rugby match between Van Den Berg High School and Willem High School ended in a serious racial conflict as a result of the parent of one of the white rugby players from Van Den Berg High School - Mrs Blou - using the racist term, 'Kaffir' to a black player from Willem High School who had earlier exchanged blows with her son (SJ1:238). The following statement - drafted by Van Den Berg's rugby coach - illustrates the incident:

During the rugby game, the undersigned walked up and down the touchline. Shortly before the end of the match an argument occurred between the players from the two teams. According to my understanding the fight happened as follows: When the whistle blew, one of the wings from the visiting school -Willem High - had the ball in his possession. A scrum was awarded to the home team. He didn't want to immediately hand over the ball to the home team. The two players tugged and pulled at the ball. The players from both teams started shoving each other and a few punches went flying. I can't recall a specific punch from any team member that went flying – neither from the home team nor from the visiting team. A lady – who was later recognised as Mrs Blou – shouted at the black player of Willem High school, referring to him as a Kaffir and went on to repeat this derogatory word in spite of my warning that in the new South Africa, such words have fallen into disfavour and should not be used. She said that she would not allow a "Kaffir" to hit her son and that she would continue to use the word because, unfortunately, she is a racist. The final whistle was blown directly after the recommencement of the game and Mrs Blou never used the word again. (Ricardo Van der Merwe)<sup>35</sup>

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35. *Tydens die rugbywedstryd het die ondergetekende langs die kantlyn op en af beweeg. Kort voor die einde van die wedstryd het 'n onderonsie tussen spelers van die twee spanne uitgebreek. Dit het na my mening as volg gebeur: Toe die fluitjie blaas het een van die vleuels van die besoekende skool, 'n swart seun, die bal in sy besit gehad. 'n Skrum is aan die tuisspan toegeken. Hy wou nie dadelik die bal aan*

What this incident tells us about integration at Van Den Berg High School is that - like other incidents of racism referred to above - this incident is a further illustration of the type of attitude towards other races to which the learners were still exposed. For all practical reasons, when a parent refers to black people as ‘Kaffirs’<sup>36</sup>, the children are more likely to emulate him/her and regard their black peers as Kaffirs. Quite often, the child’s attitude towards members of other race groups is shaped by his/her parent’s attitude towards such races. Therefore, one may ask why a person would insist on calling others Kaffirs in the post-1994 era. No doubt this was one of the impediments to integration at Van Den Berg High School and whenever the issue of integration was being foisted on the school, such incidents clearly come to mind as prominent examples.

#### 4.4.2 The stabbing incident

According to available evidence, the rugby match incident was not an isolated one that could simply be swept under the carpet as an insignificant occurrence that had no bearing on integration and, therefore, warrants no academic consideration. On the contrary, there were several other incidents - that illustrate in no small measure - that integration at Van Den Berg High School did not take place smoothly and easily. The principal had - on occasion - to refer incidents to the governing body as the following statement suggests:

Three Afrikaans-speaking boys and one black boy were involved in a fist fight. I referred the matter to the Governing Body to handle because there is strong racial tension involved<sup>37</sup> (SJ1: 67).

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*een van die tuisspan se spelers oorhandig nie. Die twee spelers het geruk en gepluk om besit van die bal. Die spelers van beide spanne het mekaar oor en weer begin stamp en ‘n paar los houe het geval. Ek kan nie onthou van ‘n spesifieke hou van enige speler wat getref het nie - nie aan die tuisspan se kant nie en ook nie aan die besoekers se kant nie. ‘n Dame - dit het later geblyk dat sy mevrou Blou is - het skielik geskree dat iemand n “kaffer” is en dit weer herhaal. Ek het haar vermaan dat ons ons binne ‘n nuwe bestel bevind en haar versoek om die word nie weer te gebruik nie. Sy het gesê dat sy nie sal toelaat dat ‘n kaffer aan haar seun slaan nie en dat sy die word sal gebruik want ongelukkig is sy ‘n rassis. Die eindfluitjie het direk na die hervatting van spel geblaas. Mev. Blou het die woord nie weer gebruik nie. Ricardo Van Der Merwe (pseudonym)1998 February.*

36. A derogatory word which was used before and during apartheid by white people in South Africa to refer to Africans. It is illegal to use the word in South Africa today.

37. *Drie Afrikaanse seuns en een swart seun het in ‘n vuigseveg betrokke geraak op die terrein. Ek het die saak na die Beheer Ligaam verwys vir hantering omdat daar sterk rassesspanning betrokke is.*

In this incident a black learner with a mental disability was frequently teased by white learners in their everyday interaction – particularly, during breaks. As could be expected, the black learner reported the matter to the teacher in charge who, then, sorted the problem out. However, off the school premises, the incident continued and turned ugly when the black learner was pressed against the school fence and was hit by three white learners. The next morning, one of the white learners, who were involved in this incident, was stabbed in the boys’ passage. No one noticed who did this or what weapon was used. The learners pressed against each other in the passage and the perpetrator had a chance to stab without being seen (SJ2:22). According to the headmaster, the school subsequently became very tense – primarily, because by its very nature the incident “was purely racist.”

It may be asked why the incident was labelled “racist”. Was it because the perpetrator was never identified? It seems as if it was presumed that a black boy had stabbed this white boy in retaliation for the beating of a mentally-challenged black boy the previous day. Be that as it may, the stabbing incident was - as the principal put it - “the most unfortunate incident ever to happen at the time the school was grappling with desegregation.” Despite of the principal’s efforts to resolve the matter between the parties involved in an amicable way, the parent of the learner who was stabbed - whom the principal described as *verkramp*<sup>38</sup> - took the legal route and enlisted the services of an attorney. “It was a nasty thing. The other two boys subsequently left the school instead of taking punishment” (Follow-up interview with the principal, October 2004). In the end, the school became calm and it was business as usual.

#### **4.4.3 White boys’ petition on hairstyle**

It is interesting to note that as black learners were struggling with issues of racism at the school - and the way some of the white learners treated them on a daily basis, white learners registered their dissatisfaction about the way they were being treated by the school. For instance, on one occasion the white learners submitted a petition to their prefects in which they complained that in their opinion, they were not being fairly treated by the school. They claimed that the school allowed black learners to come to school with long hair and funky hairstyles, such as dreadlocks, while they

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38. Ultra conservative

were denied this privilege (SJ2: 57). Although there is nothing in the school records to show how this issue was resolved, all indications are that the matter was addressed to the satisfaction of the petitioners because the problem did not recur. What the incident tells us about integration is that - in the process of involving two cultures that had been kept separate for decades to coexist and share the same space, such as the same learning environment - there is, naturally, bound to be a tension which manifests itself in increased racial conflict and misunderstanding of the 'other.'

This issue of hairstyles was a concern among most of the white learners. During my daily conversations with them, I could sense dissatisfaction on the issue of hairstyles. Most learners told me stories about how they were sent home either to wash gel out of their hair or to cut it. Most of the incidents happened in the past, especially in primary school. One intriguing story was told by Daisy, a white girl who grew up in Ethiopia and only came to South Africa in 1996.

In Ethiopia, Daisy told me that she was in a 'black' school literally because as she puts it, whites were in a minority in that Ethiopian school. She had black friends who often slept over by her house and she also slept over by theirs. She came with a braided hair to her new school in South Africa. One day she heard her name called by the principal. She went to the principal's office where she was told to remove her braids. She was brave enough to ask why she had to do it. The principal said: "*Well, the school rules do not allow it*". As she puts it, she still did not understand because almost all the African girls in that school had braids. At that particular time she had not noticed that the white girls in the school did not have braids.

She went back to her class where she asked her teacher (who was a white lady in her fifties) why she had to remove her braids. The teacher responded, "*because the principal said so*". Daisy then asked why the other girls were not supposed to remove theirs as they were also in braids. It was then that the teachers said, "Yes, they are black and you are white!" As Daisy put it, she still could not understand and continued to ask, "Are the school rules for white learners only?" At this point the teacher could not take it any longer and shouted 'unfortunately you happen to be in

South Africa my dear; here, blacks are blacks and whites are whites! They will always be treated differently because they are different’.

Daisy was very cross. She then burst out and said, ‘why are they allowed to braid their hair and I am not? They are privileged and I am not!’ With these words, the teacher was more irritated and also burst out “Do you want to look like blacks? You must be crazy and don’t you ever talk to me like that; sit down and tomorrow do not come to this school with braids in your hair, if you want braids, go to a black school!”

Daisy confessed that she never realised how important the colour of skin could be until she came to South Africa. Michael, the white boy sitting next to Daisy also made a comment on the black boys being ‘funky’ with their dreadlocks but the white boys not allowed to look funky as well. “It is not fair”, he said, “We also want to do dreadlocks”.

I asked them if they knew that they were different and their response was

Yes we know that we are different and we must be treated as such- but if we are treated different because we are different, then we get more divided and always are conscious about our differences; while if we could be allowed to do similar things we would not even be aware of our differences (Personal Conversations, 2005: May 12).

They believe that as learners, they should be treated equally in order for them to realise that they are the same. Their conceptualisation of ‘equal’ referred to ‘being allowed to do similar things.’ During the time of this research, at Van den Berg the white learners were still not allowed to put on braids and dreadlocks in their hair while black boys and girls were allowed.

The issue of hair needs a study on its own because it is as deep rooted and as old as colonialism. The white teacher in Daisy’ class cannot imagine a white girl taking over an African hair style while African learners can straiten their hair to look like white learners. This idea is the same as the one about a 13 year-old student of Middleton Technology College who was sent home because she is the wrong race for her hairstyle. The girl had her normally straight hair put in tight braids at a family outing.

Her school allows only dark skinned students to wear this particular style. She was not permitted to return to school until she removed the ‘offensive’ hairdo (World, 2005:1). The principal of the college Ms Crompton had the following to say when she was interviewed:

We don’t allow any extreme hairstyles of any description at the school. We are a high-achieving school with high standards and we don’t allow any street culture into the school. We are very strict on appearance. Wearing a school uniform signals that children are ready and willing to be a part of the school community. We have smart children who work in a purposeful way because that’s the ethos of the school. If we didn’t allow some leeway for their cultural and ethnic background I think it would probably be discriminatory (World, 2005: March 22)

I cannot help but wonder how well this would have played if it was a black girl sent home because she was wearing her hair in a “wrong” style?

#### **4.4.4 Black learners’ memorandum on racist staff**

Among other issues that the principal had to deal with in the process of desegregation at this school was the problem of alleged racism practised by his own teaching staff. The black learners - who perceived themselves as being on the receiving end of the problem - alerted him to this fact. The primary concern was that black learners were not being treated equally with their white peers by the white-only teaching staff. According to the learners, the teachers were giving black learners more demerits<sup>39</sup> than white learners - thereby creating the impression that black learners were a nuisance and that they needed constant monitoring. Upon receiving a memorandum outlining the learners’ dissatisfaction in this regard, the principal established a forum and a committee with a very clear mandate for dealing with incidents of racism in the school. The forum consisted of members of the School Management Team (SMT), white learners who were chosen by white learners and black learners who were chosen by black learners (SJ2: 234).

This incident emphasizes what Nkomo *et al.* (2006:29) noted with concern - that

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39. A note of misbehaviour or neglect of duties - ranging from making a noise in class, disrespect and homework not done to the most serious ones of fighting, skipping classes and drug usage on school premises. These were written in a discipline book against a learner’s name which then formed part of the learner’s testimonial.

learners are desegregated, but the teaching fraternity remains as it was before. As important – and, indeed, imperative – as it is to have an integrated learner profile, it is equally important to have an integrated staff. For a ‘problem-free’ educative teaching and learning environment to prevail, there should be an integration of different race groups at all levels. Personally, I support Nkomo *et al.* because - during the subsequent years at Meadow Primary School, after I successfully resolved matters among learners and learners and staff - I was elected onto a disciplinary committee of the school which, later, did not have to deal with too many racial problems. The reason for this was the cultural dimension from my side which was, otherwise, lacking from the white staff members. I found most staff members complaining, for instance, about “Sizwe not even looking up at me” when he was being reprimanded and, possibly, not apologising. Most of the problems were, mostly, cultural misunderstandings rather than disrespect. In many Western cultures, a child is expected to look an adult in the eye when being addressed, but in most African cultures that is regarded as disrespect - the child must instead look down. The children are taught something different at home from what they are taught at school. Little things like this can cause a lot of unnecessary friction - if not understood.

Klaas (2004: 239) has also noted that the teaching profile of the desegregated schools – that he researched - still remained intact. For practical reasons, as schools began to enrol learners from race groups - other than the traditional group that it used to enrol - there was bound to be new problems to deal with which emanated, largely, from differences in culture, beliefs, values, etc. With a staff profile that is mainly white, it would naturally be difficult to handle some problems involving the new race groups. In a situation, such as this one, learners are more likely to be concerned with problems of racism which are rather more perceived than real. No wonder the principal set systems in place to meet these challenges. However, there is nothing in the school records that shows how the forum - or even the committee - dealt with the issues of racism. In a follow-up interview with the principal I asked him about the duties of the forum and also for examples of incidents the forum had resolved, he said that the forum had since not had to deal with serious incidents because the incidents had ceased.

#### **4.4.5 Persistent discrimination: Stereotypes among the parents, the teachers and the learners**

Sarup (1986) explains stereotyping as a tendency to attribute characteristics – that, supposedly, belonging to a group - to every individual who is considered a member of that group. Stereotyping is one explanation of prejudice which is supplemented by the idea of premature judgment. The parents of Boipelo and of Karen prematurely judged each other in terms of race. They had their own concerns which were based on nothing concrete - as Karen's mother, finally, agreed when I asked her why she was concerned about the friendship. She confessed that she thought it was out of ignorance as her own parents had told her things about black people which she thought was what drew them apart. But, then, Boipelo's father insisted that he did not trust white people as they were "horrible to the black people for a long time." Boipelo's parents were both political activists during the apartheid era, and both had been imprisoned on many occasions. They, finally, agreed that "it was just too soon" for both parties to be close and that they did not have a problem any more.

There were also evident stereotypes amongst the learners, themselves, in the whole school. Amazingly, the stereotypes were, mostly, along ethnic lines amongst the African learners who are, usually, just classified as Africans - as if they identify themselves as such. It is assumed that African learners are the 'same' which - according to my observation at this school - was not the case. There are many disparities amongst different African ethnic groups that (although in the interest of unity, we would wish away) continue to haunt the African children. This is a legacy, that although started by the ethnic wars before apartheid, was rubberstamped by apartheid when different ethnic groups were given different places to stay and were confined there. The separate homelands has imprinted on the minds of most black South Africans - if not all South Africans, the sense that 'we are different'. The differences among the white people and the black people were ignored by the colonialist and apartheid governments. In most cases they were just regarded as black or as white – especially when it suited the government of the time. For most of the blacks, apartheid succeeded in dividing them into ethnicities in terms of which they continue to identify themselves and also to regard the others as 'stupid', 'witches', 'men-stealers', etc. - as is evident in the examples I received from the learners.

The differences are so deeply entrenched that stereotypes and prejudice amongst these African ethnic groups are, unconsciously, passed from generation to generation. The following observations in classrooms and in the schoolyard were evident of those stereotypes. It is amazing to see how we - including myself because I often find myself in this dilemma - as parents unconsciously pass on our stereotypes from generation to generation. These stereotypes, then, become the baggage of which our children have to get rid. However, they may eventually also pass those stereotypes on to their children and the vicious circle may continue, just like the holocaust (Hallford: 2004).

In a society where there is a system of discrimination, there is also widespread prejudice among members of the discriminating group (Sarup, 1986). What is different - from the data - is that the discrimination is not strictly along racial lines as one might expect or as it used to be in the past, but implies other differences - even divisions - and is caused by other mechanisms. The school serves as a place where learners can get involved in projects across colour lines. According to my observations, if a friendship went beyond the school and beyond the racial divide, it was between learners of the 'same' social class. Best friends were, mostly, within a similar language group or residential area. Amongst the African learners, friendship was, mostly, along ethnic lines; among same language groups; or between learners from the same residential areas. Richard confirmed that his friend stays in Kansas - just as he did (Conversation with Richard, 2005: May 4).

Among the African learners there is a tendency to undermine other ethnic groups and to attribute some characteristics to specific ethnic groups. Social categorisation sets a stage for stereotyped thinking (Franzoi, 2003: 124) - usually learned from others and concerns beliefs about individuals' personalities, abilities and motives. In a Hotel Management and Cooking class, the learners were preparing hamburgers for a practical test. Kholofelo, an African girl offered to make a hamburger for me so that I did not sit and watch them while they ate. This comes from the African culture where it is unacceptable to eat while someone is watching you - and you do not offer them food. Another girl shouted out in Setswana - one of the indigenous languages of South

Africa - from the far corner in response to the offer: “No madam, you must not eat it, because Tswanas are witches<sup>40</sup>”.

In a Grade 9 class, when a Venda boy, Azwindini, did not get the percentage mark that the teacher expected from everyone in the class, a Xhosa girl, Landiswa, shouted out: “Well, madam, he is Venda that is why - Vendas are *mos somaar*<sup>41</sup> stupid!” Landiswa did not even think of the implications and the consequences of what she said about the boy. She even laughed out loud after uttering these words. Later on - after the class had ended - I confronted her about what she had said in class. She again repeated it by saying: “Yes, my granny told me that Pedis, Vendas and Shangaans<sup>42</sup> are very stupid.”

She continued to tell me why her granny said that and how she had told her not to get herself a husband from those ethnic groups. What is of concern is that Landiswa believed her granny and, therefore, ruled out any possibility of anyone from those ethnic groups being clever. The depth of the belief could be picked up from the way she explained it. Given the long life and relationships one expects Landiswa to have, the belief in her granny stories is somewhat unexpected.

The tendency to attribute characteristics - which, supposedly, belong to a group - to every individual who is considered a member of that group (Sarup, 1986:49) is stereotyping. It becomes a dilemma for social groups, who have been subjected to prejudice, discrimination and negative stereotypes and devalued (Crocker *et al*, 1994: 508), to be seen differently - unless education is provided to the people who see them that way.

During break - a boy Skhosana, who is from the Ndebele ethnic group - said to one of his classmates: “You Zulus think you are better than everybody else. This time you

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40. *O a ho fora mam, o se ke wa eja, hape Batswana ba a loya.*

41. Afrikaans utterance meaning ‘nothing but’; Landiswa, a Xhosa girl thinks Vendas are nothing but stupid.

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pressed the wrong button. After school I will show you how we Ndebeles fight!”<sup>43</sup> Intervention by a Learner Representative Council (LRC) member sorted out the conflict. The boy said that the Zulus think that they are better than other people – a deep-seated sentiment, considering how cross the boy was when he uttered those words. He really believes that “*thina Amandebele*”, the Ndebele, can fight better than everybody else. This confrontation came as a result of Skhosana not taking care of his part in the group project of which Bongani - the Zulu boy - was also part. As a group, they were all given demerits because Skhosana - the Ndebele boy - did not finish his bit. I later inquired from Skhosana why he did not do his school work. He quickly replied: “Oh, madam, we Ndebeles are not meant to receive education”<sup>44</sup> - thereby implying that education belongs to the other ethnic groups.

The learners’ undermining of one another cross the ethnicity boundary to residential areas. Personal prejudice - discrimination which exists on the level of prejudice in interpersonal relationships - is also evident amongst the learners (Sarup: 1986: 49). When I asked Tshepiso - a boy who was standing next to me - to fetch me a chair from the school hall during the Grade 8 welcoming function, Kgothatso - another boy who was standing close-by said: “He will not go, madam, because children from Makushoaneng (township<sup>45</sup>) do not have respect.”<sup>46</sup>

During break - when the girls were playing netball - Marcie shouted out: “Come, my friend, let’s show the children from the suburbs/townships how we rural girls play the game of netball.”<sup>47</sup> In the past, most learners would rather lie about where they came from, but these learners had outgrown that. Most learners are proud of who they are and they do not hide where they come from - as the following statement shows: “No,

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43. *Nina AmaZulu nixabanga ukuthi nihlanagaphile ukudlula abanye abantu, manje khona uphrese I-wrong button, and ngizo kukhombisa ukuthi thina amaNdebele silwa kanjani ngemva kwesikolo.*

44. *Phela, madam, thina AmaNdebele a se funde*

45. A township was a legislated residential area for urban black people during the apartheid era and, generally, retains this demographic. There is a misconception that townships are poverty stricken and riddled with crime. On the contrary, we have some of the South African millionaires staying in most of these townships and we also experience crime everywhere in the country

46. *A ka se ye mam, gape bana ba Makushoaneng ba a tella.* This statement is in Sepedi - an indigenous language of South Africa.

47. *Etila chommy re bontshe bana ba kasi gore ko diplaseng re e betha bjang gentla.*

madam, I stay in a shack, we do not have electricity.”<sup>48</sup> I found this blunt acceptance of who they are; where they come from; and what they can do, amazing - because of my personal experience.

When I grew up in the rural area of Zebediela in Limpopo Province, I admired children who lived in Lebowakgomo and Seshego townships because they seemed - from a distance - to be better off than we were. They had running water and sewerage while we had to fetch water from the windmill two kilometres from the house, and also used pit toilets. I would, therefore, not ‘willy-nilly’ tell strangers where I came from in case they laughed at me. I regarded it as a disgrace to stay in a rural area - especially when I found myself amongst other learners from townships, more so that they always had a tendency to make one feel inferior.

Most learners were subjected to perceived injustices that the school imposed upon them. School rules, such as what your hair should look like when you come to the school, was amongst those. The white girls wanted to braid or plait their hair like the black girls because they thought the blacks girls were being privileged and they were not. The white boys also wanted to have dreadlocks in their hair. In the school rules document, one reads that “No dreadlocks are allowed in this school.” The argument of the white boys is that if the school rule does not allow dreadlocks, it should apply to the black children as well and, therefore, the rules should stop allowing some and denying the rest.

A coloured boy – Delmaine – who was the cricket star of the school alluded to other coloured boys who came from the same location as himself. He told me that when they are at home, they humiliate him because of his dark skin and say he must join “the blacks”<sup>49</sup> because he is one of them. To be dark-skinned amongst the coloured community is as humiliating as it is amongst the African people. In the following statement, Delmaine alluded to his frustration because of the colour of his skin and he

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48. *Aowa mam, gape nna ke dula ka mokhukung, ga re na mohlagase* (Sepedi).

49. *bo dakie*

lashed out at me because, sometimes, he thought I represented the government of the day when he said:

Madam, I wonder when the coloured people will be privileged. In the past when white people used to have privileges it was hard for us because we were not white enough. You see, like at present, you blacks have the government and we are not black enough (Informal Conversations, 2005: April 17).

This statement confirms the views of Richard van der Ross - the former Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape - who was chosen to represent the Coloured viewpoint on how far South Africa progressed in forming a national identity. In his article, entitled *Not white enough, not black enough*, he wrote:

Before 1994, we were not white enough, now we are not black enough. We, who are we? We are the coloured people. Oppression by whites must not be replaced by oppression by Africans. Yes, people still talk in terms of these terms and, probably, always will. We cannot be wished away (The Sunday Times, 26 September 2003).

If academics of such high calibre talk in terms of not being black enough and not being white enough, what can one expect from a Grade 11 learner? From what I could deduce from Delmaine's statement, the dark-skinned coloureds are also discriminated against. Their community teases them about their 'blackness'. I explored this idea of the 'dark skin and the concept of beauty' among other learners. Even though most African learners told me that they do not regret being black, I felt that there was a sense of inferiority amongst the ones with darker skins, such as Mpho - one dark-skinned African girl who said: "Sometimes I just wish I wasn't *this* black", pointing at the skin on her hand. When I asked her why, she said:

Because the boys tease me about it, and sometimes my friends also tease me. I feel like I should be a little lighter at least, but then I remember that I have to love myself as I am, because that is what our Life Orientation teacher teaches us (Informal Conversations, 2005:April).

I did not go out to find out the role of teachers in shaping the thinking of the learners about themselves, but surely Mpho's Life Orientation teacher teaches her to accept

herself as she is, which also assists in building a strong self- image of the learner. The aversion of - and belief in - racial inferiority were, probably, important reasons in the USA for forcing children born of mixed couples to affiliate with blacks (Ogbu, 1999:651), probably because they were not ‘white enough?’ . Black is associated with evil, ugliness, the devil, darkness, etc. African and Coloured learners tease each other about the darkness of their skins. Delmaine sadly maintained that “As long as you are dark-skinned, you are ugly - finish and *klaar*.”<sup>50</sup>

The idea of beauty amongst the learners and, possibly, throughout the black communities is somewhat *distorted* (Golden, 2004 : 148) Golden says: “I watched in horror as what Nigerians come to call ‘yellow fever’- the use of skin lightening creams - spreads across the country like a modern day plague.” The lighter your skin is, the more chance there is of people seeing you as ‘beautiful’ - and *vice versa*. She conducted an interview with Audrey Chapman - who is an author of several books on ‘black male-female relationships’; was a therapist at the Howard University Counselling Centre; and hosted a popular talk show that focused on male-female relationships at that time. Amongst statements - confirming of the effects of the colour complex - he had the following to say:

I have a lot of women who come to see me, and when we start examining where their low self-esteem springs from, it is all about hair or skin colour or features. The young men would really admit that they rarely used the word *pretty* to describe even the most attractive dark girl. One young man said: “We say that a light-skinned is pretty and a dark-skinned girl is okay” (Golden, 2004: 148).

That is why - even amongst the black communities - parents tease their children about the colour of their skin. Golden (2004) shows what her half-century of interracial and intraracial personal politics looked like as well as the dualism that existed in her home where her dark-skinned father encouraged her to be “black and proud” and her light-skinned mother would - on many occasions - shout at her to

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<sup>50</sup> Finish and klaar combines two English words and one Afrikaans word and it means “over and done”

Come on inside the house - it is too hot for you to be playing out there. I have told you don't play in the sun, because you will have to get yourself a light-skinned husband for the sake of your children!

This is a stereotype amongst men and women who think every dark-skinned black is ugly. Golden clearly reflects this idea in the following statement:

There are dominant stereotypes of white as civilized and black as barbarous. Some whites simply feel more comfortable around light-skinned blacks than they would otherwise do around dark-skinned blacks (Golden, 2004: 117).

Such representations - in turn - mirror patterns of inclusion and exclusion from citizenship rights as well as playing a role in shaping social identities in South Africa (Chisholm, 2004).

This conversation reminded me of my childhood days when I would be referred to by my siblings as “This black thing!” every time I did something wrong. Five of my siblings are all light-skinned while one of my elder sisters - to whom this thesis is dedicated - and I are dark-skinned. We grew up with a negative attitude towards our own skin colour because of what people around us said about dark skins. Like Golden, “I hated my dark black skin” Golden (2004: 116). Golden succeeds in showing how ludicrous the notion of *colourism* can be as well as the painful legacy it has created for all of us.

We live in a society which was founded upon divisions of race and colour and, therefore, light-skinned children imbibe a sense of racial and colour superiority with every breath they take (Golden 2004: 127). Beauty is subjective, personal and culturally determined. All of these perceptions are the result of the culture that has given us the language to assess beauty - as well as the perspective that defines it (Golden, 2004:133). A 1991 study found that 80% of American boys prefer blondes to brunettes or redheads (*US News and World Report: 1991*).

There are stereotypes amongst the white learners and teachers as well. When I was in a Grade 11 mathematics class, the learners had to give answers to sums. There is a

tendency amongst white teachers and learners to associate the colour of hair with intelligence. All blondes are looked upon as being stupid. After Lucia - a white girl with a nice blonde hair - got the answer wrong, the mathematics teacher - a white male - said to her, “do not answer like a blonde.” Manenge - an African boy - rubbed it in when the class was over and shouted at Lucia: “Hey you, *Blondie*, there is nothing you can tell me unless you pass the Maths test first.”

When the teacher said that, everyone in the classroom laughed. Later on, I followed up on why they laughed. They told me that it was because Lucia gave a stupid answer. According to them, it is normal for blondes to give stupid answers and for the brunettes to give clever answers. Afterwards, when I asked Lucia how she felt, she said: “Do not worry, madam, I just had my blonde moment. Tomorrow it will be different.” In confirming this ‘blonde’ and beauty thing, Golden says: “I woke up the other day and half the women I knew were all blonde” (Golden, 2004: 120).

According to Golden, black women in the USA dyed their hair blonde because everyone with a blonde hair is considered beautiful. These stereotypes are transferred from generation to generation by parents because attitudes play a very important role in regulating social relations (Franzoi, 2003: 373) The blonde hair fetish is not an artificial one among white learners - it is real and it affects the way those learners are perceived and valued by their families; by men; and by employers (Golden, 2004:139). I cannot understand how hair becomes an academic matter, just as I do not understand what skin colour has to do with academia and with beauty. When I grew up I just knew that “black is beautiful.” I learnt that from my mother, but the community outside told me something different.

Unfortunately, forms of student behaviour that suggest a deeply entrenched intolerance of each other would persist in spite of all efforts against it - as Vernon observed:

Yes, all that I can say is that I have seen and heard a lot of the Afrikaans people saying things against black people behind their backs and the black

people also doing the same. What I have noticed is that none of them is doing this publicly, probably for fear of confrontation (Vernon.txt - 2:25 [51:52]).

According to Kobus, one of the learners in the sample, the learners know that they have to get along - as he puts it: “At least we know that” (Kobus.txt - 10:27 [38:40]).

#### **4.4.6 The newspaper clipping about retaining Afrikaans as the only language of instruction**

In the post-apartheid period, the right to receive education in the official language of choice in public educational institutions is guaranteed by the Constitution (RSA: 1996 Section 29 [2]). In this particular instance the language of choice refers to either English or Afrikaans. Be it as it may, some of the parents of the school did not want to have English as a language of instruction at Van Den Berg High School. They sent newspaper clippings to the school - challenging all who took part in the decision to make the school bilingual. One of the newspaper clippings was a speech by Inkatha Freedom Party politician, Ben Ngubane, at the University of Kwazulu-Natal (UKZN) where he was quoted as saying that Afrikaans is an integral part of South Africa’s economic development and, therefore, its importance cannot be over-emphasised. All sentences that were pro-Afrikaans were highlighted by this parent (SJ2: 176)

The reader should know that the struggle for the recognition of Afrikaans as a language of teaching and learning - as opposed to English - is not a struggle that started at Van Den Berg High School in 2004. It was a struggle as old as the Great Trek where the Afrikaner people fought for their own nationalism. This struggle was amongst the three major challenges facing Lord Milner. In the Dutch-English conflict the British Milner was “preoccupied with a permanent obsession with the growing Afrikaner nationalism which appeared as a threat against his imperial ideal” (Cross, 1992: 118). From conversations with my white English and Afrikaans-speaking teacher colleagues I learnt that when Peggy Archer, one of the English-speaking teachers was still of school-going age, stones used to be thrown at her when she was passing the local Afrikaans school - on her way home after school (Conversation with Peggy Archer, 2005: May 23). This rivalry between the Afrikaans-speakers and English-speakers started in 1820 when Britain decided to send people (the 1820

Settlers) to the Cape to “make it English” (Malherbe, 1925:19).

Although the Anglo Boer War and the South African war do not form part of the scope of this study, it is important to note that they were basically struggles – although mostly economic - for supremacy of who should rule South Africa. What is note-worthy in this study about this period is that after Britain emerged victorious from the war, she wanted to assimilate the Boers into the English way of life with English as the language of instruction at schools. Most important were Milner’s ideas of the future which were based on racial segregation as a dominant strategy in all spheres of life, including education (Cross, 1992: 119). His ideas – as well as those of the leaders who followed - propagated racial segregation in education. After the National Party won the elections in 1948, they refined the ideas of their predecessors on racial segregation and discrimination. In fact, the Nationalists just perfected a system that had been in leaders’ minds for a long time.

## **4.5 CONCLUSION**

The attempts at Van Den Berg High School to break down apartheid education – which, according to Cross (1992: 67), appeared “irreversible,” was not without challenges. This chapter has focused, mainly, on a discussion of the process of desegregation as it unfolded at Van Den Berg High School - with regard to challenges and obstacles.

The next chapter concentrates on a more positive account of the process and draws on the learners’ accounts of the present. What the next chapter highlights, though, is what most researchers in the field of integration overlooked in South Africa: the learners, themselves, are integrating. The internal factors at Van Den Berg High School provide an atmosphere conducive to the integration process among the learners. Learners do not live in a vacuum - they are social beings. The role of social structure interplay in the lives of the integrating learners cannot be underestimated. The external social structures of politics, exposure, family, peer group, the church and

fashion that Dolby alludes to, play an indispensable role in the type of learners that different schools ultimately produce (2001:67).

There has been a notable shift of events at the school. If one examines the factors that led to desegregation - and later on to integration - at Van Den Berg High School, one can conclude that integration is a process. The school started admitting learners from other racial backgrounds in 1996. During that year there were not many black learners. In 1997 the number of black learners increased. There is a record of letters of complains from parents and neighbours of the school, beginning in 1997 - after the school admitted a number of black learners. During a larger part of 1998 and 1999 – and into 2000 and 2001 - the letters of complains decreased in number (Principal.1st interview.txt - 1:59 [(109:109)]).