



Communicative interactions in desegregated South African classrooms

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the following people with love and appreciation –

My loving husband, Dr Alufheli Edgar Nesamvuni for his support and for being a prayer partner, and for all the joy that he has brought into my life.

My children, **Phathutshedzo** and **Shammah Nesamvuni**, for their encouragement, understanding and support through all circumstances

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I PRISCILLA TSHISIKHAWE NESAMVUNI (student number 23394219) declare that:

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is my own original work, that all sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references, and that this thesis was not previously submitted by me for a degree to another university.

P. T. Nesamvuni

Date: _____

SUMMARY

This research is based on a case study of a former all-white Afrikaans secondary school situated in Pretoria in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The aim of this case study was to investigate and report on the complex and dynamic communicative interactions that were apparent in the events, human relationships and other elements as they unfolded and revealed themselves in desegregated classrooms in this school.

I utilised an interpretive qualitative research design as my guiding methodology. This incorporated the use of semi-structured interviews, observation, video recordings, and narrative inquiry as sources of rich and layered data. My object of research was the patterns of communicative interaction that occurred between teachers and learners and between learners. My goal was to obtain a clear analytical view of the ways in which teachers and learners from diverse racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds interacted with one another in the classroom. For this purpose I made use of multiple methods of data collection and included a variety of techniques that enabled me to triangulate the findings so as to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the empirical investigation.

An analysis of the findings revealed that the school in which the study was conducted was beset by challenges that created communication barriers between teachers and learners and between learners and learners. Such barriers to communication became evident in the use of language, in the school's failure to accommodate cultural differences, in the dynamics of class participation, in the use of both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication and in the prevalence of racism. However, some of the teachers and learners were conscious of these challenges and attitudes and strove to create a non-racist environment in their school that would negate the effects of the racist paradigm wherever possible.

The study suggests that there is a need for the South African government to take the initiative to support all desegregated schools in various practical ways if the effects of racism are not to be passed onto the next generation of adults in our country.



Key Words

Communication

Interaction

Verbal communication

Non-verbal communication

Desegregated classrooms

Assimilation

Colour-blindness

Culture

Integration

Racism



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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, dramatic changes have taken place in the country as a whole, and these changes have shaped the sense of political, social and economic identity of all its citizens, for better or for worse. Fifteen years after the first democratic election, a powerful struggle (not always visible to casual outsiders) is being waged in classrooms and other institutional settings for ownership of the means of education (Jansen, 2004; Vandeyar & Killen, 2006). Why has this struggle become so intense and why has it become imbued in some places with such powerfully negative emotions such as resentment, anger, and feelings of loss, grief and even betrayal? (Jansen, 2005; Odhav, Semuli, & Ndandini, 1999). It is this kind of challenges that prompted my interest to investigate communicative interaction of teachers and learners, and learners and learners in their classrooms.

This situation has arisen because, in the “new South Africa,” schools that were previously reserved for “whites only” in terms of the provisions of apartheid legislation were obliged by law to open their doors to black, coloured and Indian learners as well. This was done in order to “pave the way” for “Education for All” or universal access to education by people of all racial and ethnic groups (Jansen, 2004; & Sayed & Soudien, 2003b). The Freedom Charter of the African National Congress (the ANC), which dominated the political alliance which became the government in 1994, had, since its foundation at the beginning of the 20th century, committed itself to the equal right of all citizens, regardless of colour, race and religion, to receive and to contribute to educational opportunities. I therefore felt that it was appropriate after fifteen of democracy to ask and seek systematic answers to the question, “How are these learners coping together in a multiracial and multi-ethnic classroom situation?” This main question could be broken down into other pertinent questions such as: “How are learners in a mixed race setting getting along with one another?”; “How successful are they in communicating their feelings to one another, and to their educators?” and What are the modes of communication and the interactions between teachers and

learners, and between learners in these newly desegregated classrooms. (Ramaphosa, 2007; Chisholm, 2004; Kallaway, Kruss, Fataar, & Donn, 1997; Nkomo, McKinney, & Chisholm, 2004

The focus of this research is the study of communication, which is also my subject specialty as a lecturer in Communication Studies at the Tshwane University of Technology in South Africa (TUT). My particular responsibility in this post is to teach undergraduates, who have elected to study business communication, how to become successful business people by communicating effectively both in their personal and professional lives. My particular area of interest in this subject (which relates to the topic of this research) is how people in general and learners in particular interact and communicate with one another across racial and social lines and barriers. This particular interest has led me to undertake a systematic exploration of learners' communication skills, of how well they communicate their ideas and feelings in personal verbal exchanges and other forms of communication (both formal and informal), and how successful they are in conveying their meanings to teachers and other learners by means of these communications and interactions.

Apart from providing education, schools are probably the most important environment for learners to learn social and communication skills. In schools, learners learn how to use a whole range of talking skills. In so doing, they learn what kind of speech and manners are appropriate when they talk, for example, about their school, their school friends, their teachers, their personal fears and concerns, their local communities and the issues that affect the wider community of South Africa as a whole (Jansen, 1998; & Moletsane, 1999).

Since the learners who were the subject of my study were all enrolled in secondary educational institutions, they were already well aware of what was happening around them in their community, in their town, village or city, and in the wider context of South Africa as it is at present. It is my belief that *schools* play a crucial role in the education and socialisation of young adults who are enrolled in secondary education institutions, and that all secondary education institutions therefore have a particular responsibility to contribute to the development of the sense of citizenship and responsibility for others that is characteristic of the civic sense of ordinary citizens in a functional

democracy such as South Africa (Ramaphosa, 2007; Odhav, Semuli & Ndandini, 1999; Moletsane, 1999; & Nkomo & Vandeyar 2009).

It was for this reason that I decided to undertake an investigation of the particular forms of communication and interaction that are representative of those that occur in desegregated classrooms in South African schools. South African schools were only officially desegregated by law in 1994 (the year in which South Africa held its first democratic election), and so it is only comparatively recently that white learners had been required by law to share their classrooms with learners from other racial and ethnic groups in South Africa (Sayed & Soudien 2003a). I was interested, among other things, to ascertain the extent to which genuine communication and interaction had taken root in representative classrooms in the South African secondary school system. I thought that it was important to acquire a scientific understanding of the dynamics of the race and group relations in the secondary school system because it is the learners of today who will be the citizens of tomorrow.

My assumption was that if learners were being trained to communicate with one another without racial animus or prejudice, we might be assured of the survival of our newly acquired political gains and democratic freedoms in the years and decades to come. This belief, in turn, was predicated on the assumption that a democracy is only as strong as the determination of its citizens to preserve and maintain all the institutions and liberties of a democratic society (Moletsane, 1999). There is a Venda saying that goes: “Mulomo ndi khaladzi ya ndila”. This idiom means that if you want to know a place, you only have to be able to communicate in order to arrive there.

The high school that I selected for this research project experienced a large influx of black learners after 1994. During the apartheid era, when all the learners were white, the school had been what was then called a “Model C” school. This means that its facilities, buildings, activities and staff were partly funded by the government and partly funded by quite high school fees that were paid by the parents of the learners who were enrolled in the school. After 1994, these particular schools retained their white learners despite the fact that they were flooded by an influx of black learners. The sudden appearance of the many black learners in these previously all-white schools did not cause any significant “white flight”. This phrase refers to the fact that those white learners, whose

parents could afford to relocate them, took “flight” from the schools and the unwelcome presence of a great number of new black, coloured and Indian learners in formerly all-white classrooms. (Jansen & Vandeyar, 2008; Chisholm, 2004; Kallaway, Kruss, Fataar & Donn, 1997).

Given the historical circumstances of these newly desegregated schools, I decided therefore to focus on various modes of verbal and nonverbal communication and to investigate and report on the complex, dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance among learners and between learners and teachers, and to draw as many conclusions from the data as was possible given the framework of the study.

This study does not assume that the mere acceptance of black learners in a school will necessarily result in genuine integration, especially if it appears that the teaching practices that prevailed prior to the segregation have not changed to accommodate the needs and expectations of the learners and the circumstances and demands of successful pedagogy in racial and multi-ethnic classrooms (Jansen, 2004; Chisholm & Sujee, 2006). Du Toit argues that the opening of schools to all races “does not automatically ensure mutual understanding and acceptance between educators and learners and amongst learners” (Du Toit, 1995:212-213). He further suggests that so-called “desegregation” of the kind that began in 1994 does not (and maybe even *cannot*) lead to meaningful changes in the attitudes of all participants in the classroom situation (Du Toit here is referring not just to learners, but also to teachers).

1.2. Background and context of study

South African education under the apartheid system was a system of separation, exploitation and domination that was legislated by parliament and imposed on all racial groups in the country (Lemon, 2004; Maile, 2004; Cotton, 2006; James, Ralfe, van Loren, & Ngcobo, 2006). This apartheid education legislation mandated strict racial segregation in all forms of education and also required all individuals who were part of the education system to be officially classified as white, black, Indian and coloured. This formal designation of personal identity determined sanction of the law where individuals were permitted to live, how schools would be classified by the government, the universities and institutions that students would be allowed to attend, and exactly what they would be taught. Every detail of every curriculum at all levels of education

(whether in private or in government institutions) was officially required to conform to the racist doctrines of apartheid education ideology (Lemon, 2004; Maile, 2004; Cotton, 2006; & James, Ralfe, Van Loren, & Ngcobo, 2006). According to Lemon (2004:269). “Apartheid education was the only system in the world designed to restrict the productivity of its people to lowly subservient tasks, to render them non-competitive in their economy, to fix them mentally in a tribal world.”

There was a long history of resistance on the part of black people, Indians and coloureds to this racist ideology that dominated every aspect and detail of the lives and behaviour of every man, woman and child in South Africa. Black people had early on in the 20th century already registered their protest against the apartheid and the racist legislation that assigned second-rate status to every South African citizen who was not “white” by forming various organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC), which remained the most influential political organisation opposed to apartheid (Odhav, Semuli, Ndandini, 1999; & Moletsane, 1999).

After many years of struggle, suffering and resistance, a new democratic government dominated by the African National Congress (ANC) was elected in the first-ever democratic election in South Africa. Many scholars claim that the reforms that were put in place by the government in 1994 achieved little to compensate for the fundamental differences between the quality of black and white education that had been in place for the 46 years of Nationalist party rule, as well as for the many years of unequal education and opportunity that had been mandated by years of apartheid government rule and racist legislation (Maile, 2004; Lemon, 2004; & Carrim, 1998). The SASA Act 84 of 1996 new legislation concentrated on introducing market-based principles of competitive standards and parental choice in secondary education – a move that had the effect of forcing underperforming schools to close down. This had an unforeseen effect of recasting race-based segregation to segregation that was determined by class and income (Carrim, 1998; Sayed & Soudien, 2003a; & Soudien, 2004).

After the new government acceded to power in 1994, it began work on the new legislation that would result in The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. This act repealed all the apartheid legislation that regulated admission to schools and other educational institutions, and that, for the first time, provided a non-racist framework for a unified school system. This act effectively threw

open the doors of all traditionally white schools to black, Indian and Coloured learners. As soon as these white schools had opened their doors to learners of all races, a large number of (mainly) black learners, whose parents could afford the fees, flooded these traditionally white schools in the hope of providing their children with the kind of superior education that had hitherto been enjoyed only by white learners (Carrim, 1995; Jansen, 1999; Soudien & Sayed, 2003b). In reaction to this, many *white* parents, who could afford the fees, moved their children to private schools in order to prevent their children from being “overwhelmed” by the presence of “the flood” of learners from other racial groups and from having their children exposed to the widely anticipated deterioration in educational standards that many whites predicted would result from the influx of so many learners from other racial groups (Carrim, 1995; Jansen, 1999; Soudien & Sayed, 2003b).

There were in fact many schools in which racist animosity between the various racial groups was so strong that hatred and intolerance sometimes flared up into incidents of violence and abusive exchanges that made headline news throughout the country. Such incidents occurred in schools in Vryburg, Glibersdal, Trompsburg, Richmond, Delmas, Pretoria and Johannesburg, to name but a few (Odhav, et al., 1999; & Jansen, 1999). It is notable that the particular school in which I conducted my research did not experience any form of “white flight” or the violence that erupted in the schools in the places mentioned above. It was this fact that initially piqued my interest, and so I sought permission to conduct a case study that would allow me to examine the forms and modes of communication and interactions between learners, and between teachers and learners, in the recently desegregated classrooms of this school that had previously been a purely white, Afrikaans-speaking Model C school.

1.2.1. Context of the broader study

My study was founded as I was collecting the data for the broader study on *‘Exceptional patterns of racial integration in desegregated schools.* The broader study was conducted in two former white, conservative Afrikaans-medium high schools in the Gauteng Province, of South Africa. The schools were recognised by the department as models of integration. The schools were chosen on criteria such as prominent newspaper coverage of a former Model C Afrikaans school, which did not experience a “white flight” as black students entered their gates for the first time. The broader study was founded on the following objectives:

First, to capture exceptional patterns of racial desegregation expressed in the day to day operations of a conservative South African school. Second, to describe the various processes and phases of desegregation in the life of the school since the decision was made to grant access to black students. Third, to determine the extent to which racial desegregation was accompanied by social integration among black and white students. Fourth, to evaluate the ways in which second-order changes have accompanied the increase in black enrolments e.g. changes in curriculum, changes in staffing, and changes in the visible symbol associated with the dominant racial culture and history of the school, and lastly, to explain the trajectories of deracialization within white, working class school and what this might mean for educational policy and planning. (Vandeyar & Jansen, 2008:1&2)

The methodology used in the broader study was the method of portraiture made famous in the social sciences by Harvard university's Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot in her Landmark study, *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture*. Portraiture as defined by Lawrence – Lightfoot (2002:3) “is a method of inquiry that seeks to combine systemic, empirical description with aesthetic expression by blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities rigor that is shaped by the lenses of history, anthropology, psychology, and sociology” Portraiture concentrates on drawing attention to the outstanding qualities of high schools, and on emphasising whatever is excellent in them rather than focusing exclusively on what is dysfunctional and pathological. The methodological compass of portraiture begins with the question: “What is it that is good here? (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983:10).

The team members of the broader study project comprised of: Professor S. Vandeyar and Professor J. Jansen as team leaders, Tshisikhawe Nesamvuni, Hlengiwe Sehlapelo, Heidi Esakov, Nicola Hills and Gershan Greeff. All of us assisted with data collection. The data was collected between 2005-2006.

1.2.2. Context of my study

Whilst capturing data for the broader study as outlined above, my interest was drawn to the manner in which the dynamics of communication were playing out at one of these schools. As much as the broader study was looking for examples of ‘excellence’ and ‘goodness’ at this school,

what caught my attention as a person with an interest in communication, was the different modes of communication and interactions between teachers and learners, and between learners in desegregated classrooms at this school. My study thus evolved as a case study of this one school taken from the broader study in the Gauteng province of South Africa.

As a team member of the broader study participating in the capturing of the data, through video taping and interviews, my interest was aroused by the communication of teachers and learners, and between learners, which was not the focus of the broader study. I approached the leaders to make them aware of the interest of my study. I followed the ethical rules of the institution in conducting the research. As a point of entry for data collection I observed the video footage of the broader study of the two schools checking the viability of my study. In one of the schools I reviewed some of the positive and negative dynamics of communicative interactions between teachers and learners in desegregated classrooms, which was my main interest. I then went to the school with permission to observe the classes of the teachers that I saw in the video footage to validate the information. I collected the data using video tapes, individual semi-structured interviews, field notes, and observational methods, with the teachers and learners who assented to participate in my study. I used narrative inquiry and conventional qualitative methods as a way of analysing data,; scrutiny of the text, that is the transcription of audio taped interviews and video footage, field work notes made during classroom observations, whereby emerging themes were identified.

1.3. Historical Context

1.3.1. Pre-1994

A review of the available literature shows that all education in South Africa under apartheid was characterized by racism and segregation. (Nkomo, Chisholm & McKinney, 2004) argue that definitions of race and associated forms of racism played a fundamental role in the ideological underpinning of the “separate development” that was the cornerstone of apartheid policy. While segregated education was therefore inherently unequal, it served its ideological purpose of creating a mindset of white supremacy in the whites who dominated black people between 1948 and 1994. Although South Africa was not the only country that had institutionalised segregated education, it was different from those other countries in that the apartheid government had legislated every detail of life for every citizen in South Africa. South Africa was the only country in the world in

which every aspect of every citizen's life was determined by legislation that had been passed by the government. Ramaphosa (2007) and Moletsane (1999) argue in this regard that all the normal freedoms that are enjoyed in a democratic society (such as freedom of association, freedom of the press, the freedom to marry whomever one wished, and so on) were all suspended and subjected to the provisions of apartheid legislation. In writing about the problem of segregation in an American context, Brown, as cited in Tate (1997: 215) wrote:

...Segregated schools were unconstitutional primarily because of the message that segregation conveyed – that black children are an untouchable caste, unfit to be educated with white children. Segregation serves its purpose by conveying an idea. It stamps inferiority upon Blacks...

The same attitudes prevailed in South Africa. Race was historically the primary determinant of intellectual and educational aptitude in South Africa under the apartheid regime.

According to Moodley (2004) claimed that South African education was construed in hierarchical terms and colour coded within a carefully crafted, politically legitimated pigmentocracy. Education for whites during the apartheid era was compulsory for all white children; it was also free and was lavishly endowed by state funding. White schools therefore had access to exceptional resources and opportunities to create facilities that were unavailable to the schools in which other races were educated (Carrim, 2002; Soudien & Sayed, 2003a). Swanepoel & Booyse (2003) note that the provisions and resources made available for black education were inferior in every way to those that were provided for white education because black education under the apartheid regime was specifically designed to maintain the poverty and status quo of blacks. Black apartheid education suffered from all the following disadvantages: a lack of state funding, an insufficient provision of physical education facilities, a shortage of schools for the number of learners that needed to be educated, a lack of running water and toilet facilities, a high dropout rate, curriculum deformities and deficiencies, inadequate teacher training, and, most of all, from the overworked, demoralised, underpaid and unmotivated teachers who staffed the apartheid schools (Swanepoel & Booyse, 2003).

Literature shows that young black people, exasperated by the refusal of the authorities to address their grievances, took the law into their own hands and demonstrated their dissatisfaction with

segregated education through the countrywide uprisings of 1976 – the best known of which were the so-called Soweto riots during which the police fired on students. These countrywide riots and unrest served to politicise young black people and to sensitise them to the political struggle for freedom from oppression. Ironically, therefore, it was the poor conditions and injustices of the apartheid education system that became a kind of finishing school for the black political activists of the future and the means by which they were able to construct a rationale for using political unrest as a means to achieve political ends (Fraser, 1995; Ramaphosa, 2007; Odhav, et al., 1999).

Nothing was ever the same again after the Soweto riots of 1976. The seeds of regime change, so long incubated, began to grow in every young black person in South Africa. The very institutions that had been designed by the government to keep black people forever quiescent and obedient became an effective breeding ground for political activism and revolutionary change. The injustices of the apartheid education system made it clear to call young black people that they were the victims of a system of institutionalised racism from which they could only escape by their own efforts and sacrifice (Fraser, 1995; Ramaphosa, 2007; Odhav, et al., 1999).

1.3.2. Secondary education in post-apartheid South Africa

Carrim (2002) has observed that the apartheid legacy is best understood as a variety of “mechanisms within the construction of exclusionary, racist patterns of domination and privilege, and the anti-colonial ‘critical struggles’ of the anti-apartheid movement”. Carrim argues that the government in post-apartheid South Africa is trying to abolish the exclusionary doctrines of apartheid so that it becomes inclusive of all the people of South Africa (Carrim, 2002).

The literature provides evidence that although it has now been over a decade since the advent of democracy in South Africa, racial problems and incidents of racial confrontation among learners are still frequently reported in both the media and by researchers (Vally, Dambala & Porteus, 2002; Jansen, 2004; Meier, 2005; & Vandeyar, 2008). Fataar (1997) suggests that the present democratic government of South Africa is seeking to redress the inequality that was created and implemented by the apartheid government. He also suggests that it is the purpose of the new government to create the conditions in which people will be able to enjoy the various human rights that are universally accepted as the birthright of all human beings on this planet – rights that are

reflected in the Universal Declaration Of Human Rights of the United Nations and other progressive documents and charters such as the Freedom Charter of the ANC. Since the elections of April 1994, most of the ministries in the “government of national unity” were active in developing documents that reflected policy and public discussion and debates about the steps that needed to be taken to reconstruct South Africa after three and a half centuries of colonialism and white domination of the political landscape (Fataar, 1997).

Both Soudien (2004) and Jansen (1998) point out that while there was a concerted movement of black learners to enter what had been white schools, there was no corresponding movement of white students to black schools – proof, that provisions for black education were universally regarded by people of all races as inferior to those provided for white learners (Soudien, 2004; & Jansen, 1998). One of the earliest and most comprehensive initiatives in the sphere of education of the new democratic government was to pass the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, (colloquially referred to as “SASA”). Because SASA initiated the process of integrating schools, it created many opportunities for teachers and learners to interact and communicate with one another during the course of their everyday teaching and learning – something that had never been possible under the previous government.

Even though these interactions created difficulties, problems and challenges, the provisions of SASA offered learners and teachers from every racial and ethnic group in South Africa the chance to get to know one another as human beings, to interact during the course of daily business, and to form relationships and bonds of friendship and cooperation. SASA was intrinsically valuable because it created natural opportunities for communication and interaction in the context of schools that had previously been impoverished by the racist doctrines of the apartheid government.

1.4. Problem statement

Now that schools in South Africa have become desegregated, they are faced with a set of challenges and problems that are different from those that they experienced under the previous government. As I have already noted above, the literature shows that although it has been over a decade since the introduction of universal democracy, racial problems and incidents of racial confrontation are still frequently encountered among learners and reported by both the media and

by researchers (Vally, Dambala, & Porteus, 2002; Jansen, 2004; Meier, 2005; & Vandeyar, 2008). The main intention of the government when it introduced SASA in 1994 was to create ways of redressing the inequalities and injustices that were institutionalised under the apartheid government. The effect of SASA was to abolish apartheid in education and open the doors of all schools to learners of all races and ethnic groups. Most of the previously white English and Afrikaans schools therefore experienced an influx of black learners into their schools.

The sudden transition from totally segregated education to a desegregated educational environment was too rapid for some of the teachers and learners who had to accept and accommodate learners from diverse racial groups and backgrounds. Many teachers were trained in segregated teacher training colleges during the apartheid era with the expectation that they will be teaching a class of monocultural learners. Now they were expected to teach group of learners from diverse backgrounds on the basis of the same qualification of training that was meant for a different cohort of learners. The government did not negotiate with individual educators in terms of their willingness and ability to teach through the medium of English (Odhav, et al., 1999; Jansen, 2004; Ndimande, 2004; Soudien & Sayed, 2003b; & Chick 2002). At the same time learners who are from the same background as the teacher, find themselves in a “new environment” where they have to communicate and interact with learners from a diverse background that is different from what they are used too. It is expected that teachers and learners in a multiracial and multi-ethnic environment will come from settings in which racial, cultural, linguistic and socio-economic conditions are different, and that the members of each of these different groups will operate in terms of concepts and assumptions that will vary from one racial, religious, cultural and ethnic group to another (Odhav, et al., 1999). In other words, the frames of reference that members of different racial groups will use to orientate themselves in relationships with other people will be different. Such differences can pose a significant challenge to teachers and learners in desegregated classrooms as they strive to understand and accommodate one another in day-to-day educational activities. Accordingly this study asks: **How do learners from diverse racial backgrounds communicate and interact with each other and with their teachers at school?**

1.4.1. Sub-questions

In addition to the main research question the following sub-questions apply to the topic:

- 1.4.1.1 How does verbal and non verbal communication contribute to interaction between teachers and learners and between learners in desegregated classrooms?
- 1.4.1.2 How are learners in a mixed race setting getting along with one another?
- 1.4.1.3 How successful are learners in communicating their feelings to one another and to their teachers?

1.5. Aim of the study

The aim of this study is:

- 1.5.1. To explore all aspects of communication and interactions between teachers and learners in desegregated South African classrooms
- 1.5.2. To explore all aspects of communication and interactions between learners in desegregated South African classrooms.
- 1.5.3. To examine the nature and structure of verbal and non-verbal forms of communication between teachers and learners, and between learners in desegregated South African classrooms.

1.6. Rationale of the study

Meier (2005) argues that black learners have found it very difficult to adjust to and cope with the new desegregated educational environment. Meier suggests this is because black learners (among whom I include coloured and Indian learners) were not furnished with the necessary skills, particularly with regard to language and communication that are essential for the success in an outcomes-based education system. There can be no doubt that background knowledge (which is sometimes referred to as “prior learning”) helps learners to be more successful in the realisation of their learning outcomes (Lindeque & Vandeyar, 2004). One can find the origins of this observation in the writings of educational theorists such as Vygotsky, who refers to what he described as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a critical learning period in the development of children during which learners become adept to the social construction of their human environment and in their understanding of the world around them (Cole & Cole, 1996).

Meier's argument, which is explained above, makes sense when we realize that many generations of black learners were in fact never given the opportunity to participate in proper education during the apartheid years. The accumulated deficits in all areas of achievement from which black learners historically suffer, make it quite clear why most of them still struggle in South African classrooms and in the school environment as a whole. South African schools are still themselves in the throes of developing a new *modus operandi* that will enable them to make the necessary changes to a truly non-racist educational environment. Such a process requires that every participant in the process (whether teacher or learner) examine his or her behaviour and attitudes in the light of the nonracist paradigm that the new government wishes to impose on the South African education system, and make whatever changes necessary to further this process. Fraser (1995:43) argues that:

These learners often projected an image of incompetence, illiteracy, and ignorance, which is mistakenly regarded by some as indicative of inherent failings but in fact is the result of a historically inferior education system.

Other researchers such as (Vandeyar & Jansen 2008) have noted that not much research has been conducted into the prevailing conditions in those schools that experienced a significant influx of black learners without a corresponding flight of white learners. It seemed to me, as a novice researcher and lecturer in Communication, that a systematic examination and description of the communication and interactions in just such a school might provide a valuable contribution to our current understanding of the difficulties that are being faced in desegregated classrooms in South Africa. I decided at the outset of the research to pay special attention to the various forms of verbal and non-verbal communication that took place between participants in the classroom as the locus of my research.

I was also motivated by my personal experience as a black learner and, latterly, a black lecturer in post-apartheid environments in South Africa. I had also laboured under the necessity to "learn" to communicate effectively with people who were different from me in their racial and cultural origins. These experiences at least provided me with some prior first hand experience of the problems that I hope to investigate.

1.7 Brief description of the research

This research study utilises a qualitative case study approach and narrative inquiry to investigate the research question. McMillan & Schumacher (2001:15) claim that “qualitative research presents data as a narration with words”. Qualitative research focuses on meaning, experience, understanding, and it is used when a researcher needs opportunities to interact with those individuals or groups whose experiences and narratives the researcher wants to understand (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2001), as is the case with my study.

The selection of the school site was influenced by the broader study. It was a multiethnic, multiracial, school in a suburb in the Gauteng province. It was a school that formerly catered exclusively to Afrikaans-speaking white learners, but with the advent of democracy, opened its doors to different racial learners groups (Indian, coloureds and blacks). The school thus had a representative sample of white and black learners.

The participants comprised of 5 teachers, two white males, between the ages 45 and 50, one white female between the ages of thirty five and forty, two black females, between the ages of thirty five and forty five. One of the black ladies was non South African. There were twelve learners from different classes. Grade 9, four learners between the age of twelve and thirteen, black female, Indian male, white female and coloureds male. Grade 10, four learners between ages thirteen to fifteen, black male, Indian female, white male, coloured female. Grade 11, four learners between the ages fifteen to eighteen, black female, white female, Indian male coloured male. The total numbers of participants were seventeen. The video footage encompassed the following subjects, Grades 9, 10 and 11 Mathematics, Business Economics, Economics, Biology, Computer studies and Drama; English and Accounting.

The data were collected in 2007 through video footage, individual semi structured interviews using audio tapes, field notes and observational methods. I used conventional qualitative methods as a way of analysing data: scrutiny of the text, that is the transcription of audio taped interviews and video footage, field work notes that were made during classroom observation.

1.8. The limitations of the research

The following factors can be regarded as limitations of the research:

- The research was limited to learners at a particular school in Gauteng.

I encountered a few minor problems while conducting the study. At the beginning of the study, for example, I became aware of varying degrees of resistance among some of the learners and teachers whom I had selected for observation. They were initially sceptical about the purpose of the interviews and were suspicious of the rationale and purpose that informed it. Some of them were rightly concerned about any negative scrutiny to which they might be exposed. My reaction to these fears was to go to great lengths to allay the concerns of the teachers and learners by spelling out the purpose of the study and the benefits that it might generate. I also made it very clear to all the participants that my study was in no way designed to assess the quality of the education that the learners were receiving or to quantify or otherwise judge the extent to which the participant learners were familiar with their subject content. I also assured them that there were no wrong or right answers in this research. I also challenged their fears about undue and unlawful exposure by explaining the ethical procedures that I had instituted to protect the real names and identities of both the teachers and learners and to prevent them from being exposed to any kind of external criticism or scrutiny. I also assured them that the ethical procedures that govern research involving human participants under the aegis of the University of Pretoria were non-negotiable and that their right to confidentiality would never be compromised. These assurances seem to mitigate and dispel the fears and worries of the participant teachers and learners.

- Some of the teachers whom I first identified in the video footage refused to be interviewed. I accepted these refusals without question and without asking for reasons because all participation in the research was entirely voluntary, and any request for reasons could rightly be interpreted as undue pressure and influence which are specifically forbidden in terms of the ethical guidelines that govern social science research in the university.

- The learners and teachers might have been influenced to moderate their usual behaviour because of my use of the video camera. This constitutes the well-known “observation effect” that has already been discussed above.
- The researcher entered the research process from the advantage point of her own personal and professional bias and knowledge.
- The research was conducted at one research site that had experienced dramatic changes during the past fifteen years. This might well have exerted an influence on the observational data because the school concerned is widely known from its reputation in various fields. And because the participants were aware that their behaviour and interactions would constitute a significant part of the research project, they may have moderated their interactions and reactions to some extent in order to preserve and enhance the existing reputation of their school.
- Because I was not initially experienced in the use of a video recorder, the quality of the data that I collected during the early stages may have been compromised.
- The use of one case study does not provide one with sufficient grounds for generalising the results obtained to other similar situations or other cohorts of participants.

1.9. Definitions of terms

What follows is a brief description of the major terms and concepts that I used to frame ideas during the conduct of the case study and in the subsequent analysis of the data that I was able to accumulate from observations and interviews.

1.9.1 **Communication** may be described as a functional, dynamic and transactional process by means of which two or more individuals intentionally attempt to share their meanings and to improve their understanding of one another or of other questions or problems under consideration by sending and receiving and interpreting verbal and non-verbal messages (Olivier & Plooy-Cilliers, 2000).

1.9.2. **Verbal communication** is any form of communication that utilises words. Verbal communication therefore includes both *spoken words* (such as one encounters, for example, in conversation, interviews and radio broadcasts) and *written words* (such as one encounters, for

example, in letters, books, posters, classroom notes, and so on). The codes that underlie verbal communications are embedded in language (Cleary, Harran, Luck, Potgieter, Scheckle, van der Merwe, & van Heerden, 2002).

1.9.3 **Non-verbal communication** refers to all human communication that does not use written or spoken words but that makes use of various signs, signals and movements of the body and/or face in order to convey a particular meanings (Cleary et al., 2002).

1.9.4. **Integration** means a fundamental change, not only in the personal attitudes of learners and educators, but also in the institutional arrangements, policies and ethos of schools (Vally, 1999; & Vandeyar, 2008).

1.9.5. **Desegregation** may be regarded as the imposition of an arrangement in an institution such as a school, which results in ensuring the physical proximity of all members of different racial and ethnic groups in the same school concerned. Such an approach is not primarily concerned with the quality of contacts that will result from the desegregation of a school, but only in the physical process itself (Vally, 1999; & Vandeyar, 2008).

1.9.6. **Interaction** refers to a two-way exchange between members of two or more groups, during which both sides actively participate in the process and share various thoughts, attitudes and opinions as part of the interaction (Vandeyar & Killen 2006)).

1.9.7. **Assimilation** occurs when one ethnic or cultural group internalises the behaviour, values, perspectives, ethos, and characteristics of another ethnic group and, by so doing, largely relinquishes its prior ethnic and cultural identity (Soudien & Sayed, 2003b),

1.9.8 **Colour blindness**. The other close perspective associated with assimilation; in the context of race based desegregation are claims of colour blindness. **Colour blindness** occurs when teachers suppress the negative images they hold of learners of other races by professing not to see colour (Zafar, 1998; & Jansen 2004).

1.9.9. **Culture** is a system of assumptions and preconceptions “that define the forms, functions, and content of communication” Gay (2000:79).

1.10. Outline of the thesis

What follows here is a brief description of each of the chapters that make up the content of this thesis.

1.10.1. **Chapter 1:** This chapter introduces the historical conditions and the intellectual and moral context in which the framework of the study developed. This chapter also includes information about the background of the study, the aim of the study, problem statement, the formulation of the research question, and the rationale for the study, and brief description of research, limitation of research. It also provides a list of definitions of the major operative terms that are used in the study.

(NOTE: The literature review is divided between two chapters – chapter 2 and chapter 3.)

1.10.2. **Chapter 2:** This chapter presents findings from the literature that underpins communication models and the concept of communicative interaction.

1.10.3. **Chapter 3:** This chapter presents findings from the literature that describe what is known about communicative interaction in desegregated South African classrooms, and the contributions that have been made by researchers throughout the world to our knowledge of the conditions that prevail in desegregated education.

1.10.4. **Chapter 4:** This chapter describes the research method that was adopted by the researcher and the data collection procedures that were utilised in the accumulation of the data.

1.10.5. **Chapter 5:** This chapter presents the findings themselves together with an analysis of the significance of the findings.



1.10.6. **Chapter 6:** This chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of this research in the context of present-day South Africa, and concludes with various recommendations and suggestions for further research in this area.

CHAPTER 2

Defining communicative interaction: An overview

“Those who keep our eyes open can read volumes into what we see going on around us” (Hall, 2005:3).

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to offer descriptions of various models of communication and to show how these models developed from the earliest days of the discipline. It will also describe the communication models that I selected for this study (chapter 2). Chapter 3 will offer a selection from the findings of various studies from all over the world that have specifically focused on communicative interaction in classrooms and on communication and interactions in desegregated classrooms in particular.

I will therefore present a comprehensive examination of the role that communicative interactions have played in classrooms and their relevance to this study. This chapter will include definitions of communication, a review of types of communication, some reference to the relevance of these models to the present study, and an examination of a selection of models of communication. It will conclude with a justification of the need for a study of the communicative interactions that takes place in classrooms.

Communication plays a fundamental role in the interactions between teachers and learners in the classroom. Proper learning can only take place when learners and teachers have the skills to communicate effectively with one another. Since this whole study is based on communication theory, it will be necessary to present clear and comprehensive definitions of communication, and of a kind of communication that takes place in desegregated classrooms. But before I offer the definition of communication that will be most useful for the purposes of this study, it is necessary to acknowledge that dozens of plausible definitions of communication exist because of the complexity and richness of the discipline of communication as it has developed during the last half-century. Trenholm (as cited in West & Turner, 2004: 4) illustrates the dilemma of trying to define the term *communication* in one particular way when she writes: “Communication can be

defined as a two-way process whereby information (message) is sent from one person (sender) through a channel to another (receiver) who in turn reacts by providing a feedback” (West & Turner, 2006:4). The implications of this definition are immense, and will be examined in the pages that follow.

The definition of communication as a *process* already gives some indication of its complexity and emphasises the notion that many communications are part of a process of continuous evolution and change. Du-plooy-Cilliers, & Olivier (2000:5& 7) extended this particular understanding of communication when they define “*communication* as a functional, dynamic and transactional process whereby two or more individuals deliberately try to share meaning and to promote understanding by sending and interpreting verbal and non verbal messages. Therefore, we can say that communication is a deliberate attempt by two or more individuals to share meaning. However, the sharing of meaning is not a simple task and people frequently misunderstand one another.” This implies that nearly all communications involve people who communicate and interact with one another on the basis of their various intentions, motivations and abilities. In the second place, it implies that communications often have more than one meaning and that they frequently convey multiple layers of meaning.

Martin and Nkanyama (2004) point out that the term *meaning* is always context-bound, and that it is therefore always predicated on the ability of the communicators concerned to understand the social and cultural consequences of the communications that they receive and send. This approach to communication emphasises the need to understand each separate communication in its social and cultural context (or, as is the case in this research, in its educational context). The definitions provided above suggest that communication is nearly always dynamic, complex and continually changing. We may therefore conclude that communications are neither rigid nor stable, but are part of an open-ended process that is without beginning or end. This has important implications for teachers and learners in the classroom.

A consideration of the elements of the above definitions also indicates that meaningful cooperation between teachers and learners can never take place in the absence of interaction and communication. This means that it is vitally important for both teachers and learners to be aware

of the respective roles that they play in the processes of communication. They need to recognise that interactions and communication are part of a dynamic process that arises out of the past and continues into the future. The implication of this is that the conversations and discussions that take place between teachers and learners, and between learners, are part of a creative process of meaning-construction that is fluid and open-ended (West & Turner, 2004).

While non-specialists tend to think of communication as interactions that are dependent upon the written or the spoken word, there is another category of communication that is often even more powerful than communications that are couched in words, and that is the category of non-verbal communication. Both teachers and learners need to be trained to recognise the power and meaning of non-verbal communications such as those that emanate from body language and facial expressions (Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005).

2.2. Types of communication

Communications vary according to the processes and methods that communicators use, as well as the channels and styles to convey a communication. Communications can in fact be categorised according to the communication channels that communicators use as well as the particular style that communicators utilise. One can also categorise communication by considering the idiosyncratic style and purpose of the particular communications that are involved. Some communications are, for example, formal while others are informal. For the purposes of the study, I will concentrate on the two major styles of verbal and non-verbal communication.

2.2.1. Verbal and non-verbal communication

In discussing verbal and non-verbal communication, I will consider them together rather than separately. This is necessary because nearly all the observations that can be made about verbal communication apply with equal relevance to non-verbal communication. It is therefore unnecessary to discuss them separately because they operate in the same way – even though the modes of transmission and expression of these two forms of communication are distinctively different.

Cleary, et al., (2002:20) define *verbal communication* as “any communication involving words”. Verbal communication includes the kind of *spoken* words that are used, for example, in conversations, interviews, radio broadcasts and so on, as well as the *written* words that are used, for example, in letters, books, posters, emails, SMSs, notes taken in classrooms, and so on. The codes upon which verbal communications are therefore dependent is language in the form of words.

Non-verbal communications, by contrast, refers to communications that are received and delivered by means other than words (Knapp & Hall, 2006; Hybels & Weaver II, 2004). Cleary et al., (2002:21) assert that “non-verbal communication is symbolic because it involves the use of socially defined symbols that are intended to convey messages, and are not necessarily the same for each diverse group”. They also add that non-verbal communications function in three separate ways: they express meaning, they modify verbal messages, and they regulate the flow of interaction (Cleary et al., 2002). Knapp and Hall (2006) classify non-verbal communications according to the way in which they occur in terms of the three following contexts: (1) the physical environmental and the specific conditions within which the communication takes place, (2) the physical characteristics of the communicators themselves, and (2) the various kinds of behaviour that communicators use to convey non-verbal information.

The *physical environment* refers to the way in which people use the elements that are present in their environment to project the information that they want to convey by non-verbal means. But the physical environment also exerts a powerful effect upon human beings and their ability to communicate. The nature, structure, aesthetic configuration and presentation of our physical environment inevitably exert a powerful effect upon our moods, our choice of words, and our actions. The following elements, for example, all induce powerful emotions and reactions in the human beings who are exposed to them: furniture, architectural style and design, interior decoration, pictorial representations, signboards, and even posters, photographs, sketches and paintings (Jansen, 2007; & Wood, 2002)

Human beings are also crucially affected by the power relations that prevail in the various environments (such as schools and classrooms) in which they find themselves. The power

relations in any given environment, such as a classroom or school, is obviously affected by the status, rank and influence of all the individuals and groups that inhabit the environment. The rank, status and prestige that is assigned to individuals and groups in places such as classrooms and schools indubitably affect the quality and effectiveness of the communications that are sent and received by those who are present in the environment. An awareness of the status and prestige assigned by any “system” (such as a school) to particular individuals and groups is a crucial factor in any consideration of the kind of information that is being conveyed by either verbal or non-verbal means. The nature of the environment in which teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions take place exerts a decisive effect on the quality, effects and outcomes of the interactions that take place in the school environment (Knapp & Hall, 2006; Jansen, 2007; & Khan, 2001).

The physical characteristics and behaviour of the communicators themselves refer to those bodily movements and postures as well as the enormous variety of (mostly unconscious) facial expressions by means of which human beings have been communicating vital information for millions of years. Human gestures, postures, various forms of touching, facial expressions, eye contact and non-verbal vocal expressions – to name but a few – are therefore very helpful in interpreting meaning in communication research (Cleary et al., 2002; West & Turner, 2006). In a classroom environment, for example, the way in which teachers position themselves is unconsciously (or possibly even consciously) interpreted by learners as expressions of the way in which particular learners are favoured by the teacher above the others who are also present in the classroom. When a teacher, for example, always delivers a lesson from a position next to particular learners on one side of the room, this might be a non-verbal signal that the teacher probably favours the group of learners in his/her proximity over and above that of other learners in the classroom (Vandeyar & Killen, 2006; & Vandeyar, 2008)

Other forms of common non-verbal bodily communication on the part of a teacher in a classroom include the proximity of a teacher to a particular learner or group of learners (the greater the proximity, the greater the approval), leaning on a particular learner's desk, and inviting particular learners or groups of learners to a conference conducted in quietly spoken words around the teacher's table at the front of the classroom while the other learners in the classroom are pointedly

ignored or (even worse) verbally abused and discouraged when they tried to enter the favoured circle. Teachers are also adept at conveying signals of approval and disapproval by means of their facial expressions (the means most commonly used by human beings to convey non-verbal information). A teacher will therefore smile at a favoured learner or learners, and, conversely, become remote and look pained, irritable, dismissive and sarcastic when a particular learner or group of learners whom he/she does not favour, attempts to communicate with him/her. It is clear from this that an extraordinary amount of crucial information can be conveyed by teachers (and also by learners) without the exchange of a single spoken or written word. (Vandeyar & Killen, 2006)

Case study takes into account the fact that the learners and teachers who participated in the case study were from various cultural backgrounds and different racial groups. Teachers and learners from such disparate backgrounds and cultures may operate according to quite different frames of reference when one deciphers and decodes the various forms of nonverbal communication that one can observe in a classroom. It is important for a teacher to communicate effectively with learners when he/she is attempting to convey important information to them (Cleary et al, 2002; Wood, 2002; & West & Turner, 2006). While this is usually effected by means of words, the quality and tone of the communication both sent and received is also either augmented or negated by the non-verbal body language and facial expressions that accompany the articulation of the message concerned.

In Venda culture, for example, it is a sign of disrespect to look into the eyes of an adult who is talking to one. In European-derived cultures, on the other hand, it is a sign of shiftiness, disagreement, insincerity and possibly even dishonesty, when the person who is talking to you does not look into your eyes. In some culture, therefore, it is a sign of honesty and sincerity when someone who is talking to you holds your gaze by looking into your eyes. It is interesting to note that averting the eyes as a sign of respect towards the person who is talking is not limited to African cultures. It is also a profoundly important element in non-verbal communication in many Middle Eastern, Pan-Asian and Oceanic cultures (Olivier & Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2001; & West & Turner, 2004). The *quality* of communication therefore has significant implications for implementing what Gay (2000:77) refers to as “culturally responsive teaching”. This is the case

because “what we talk about, how we talk about it, what we see, [what we] attend to or ignore, how we think, and what we think about, are [all] influenced by our *culture*” (Gay 2000:77).

Such findings have pedagogic implications for teachers and learners. What these observations imply for teachers, for example, is that they should not make assumptions about the meaning of non-verbal communications without verifying what such communications mean in the culture of the person who is sending and also receiving such communications. By the same token, a teacher should never reprimand or punish a learner without conducting a careful process of verification into the meaning of a particular form of non-verbal communication. It is normally the responsibility of the *sender* of information to make certain that the receiver will receive the message and interpret it in the way in which the sender meant it to be received. But is this kind of verification and understanding of the different cultural codes of people from different cultural and racial groups even possible? (Cleary, et al., 2002; Olivier & du Plooy-Cilliers, 2001).

If teachers were to abide by the above prescription in the educational settings in which they find themselves, they would have to accept responsibility (when initiating any form of verbal or non-verbal communication) for ensuring that learners understand the message in the same way in which the teacher understands it. Is this possible or even feasible in a multicultural and multi-ethnic classroom? This is one of the main difficulties on which I hope that the case study and my analysis of the data obtained from it will be able to illuminate. For a channel of communication to be clear and unambiguous, the channel itself must be able to permit reciprocal communications. In other words, it needs to work both ways (Cleary, et al., 2002; Hybels & Weaver II 2004; & West & Turner, 2004).

It is the opinion of Nkomo, Chisholm, & McKinney, (2004) that the amount of human damage inflicted on individuals and groups by the application of apartheid policies, was prolonged that little or no effective communication and interaction can take place between blacks and whites in South Africa (Nkomo, et al.,2004). Nkomo, et al., (2004) points out in the same study that because black and white learners were separated by such stringent and punitive laws, and because whites in particular were programmed and conditioned to think of blacks as inferior and incapable, any attempts in post-apartheid South Africa to create an atmosphere of normality in multiracial and

multi-ethnic classrooms are probably doomed to failure. Nkomo reminds us that because black and white learners were prevented *by law* from having any form of contact with one another, a great gulf of misunderstanding opened up in apartheid South Africa between white citizens and all the others citizens of this country. The silent or unspoken message of the power relations in apartheid South Africa was that because white and black learners did not belong to the same “natural” order of human culture, they could not interact in a friendly and helpful way with one another.

But the very existence of unspoken language during the heyday of the apartheid era, suggests that it might be possible to reverse (to some extent at least) the human tragedy that was inflicted on people of all races and ethnic groups by another set of silent and unspoken messages that will convey to black, Indian and coloured learners the information that they are immensely valuable and valued members of society and of the schools that they attend, and that their status and dignity in no way depends upon the colour of their skin or the ethnic culture or religion in which they have been nurtured (Bhana, 1999).

The silent and unspoken messages implied by the policies of apartheid need to be reversed and negated by an equally powerful discourse of the approval and acceptance of those who were the victims of the apartheid state. In other words, the wrongs and grievances of those who were at the receiving end of the dehumanising policies of the previous regime need to be systematically addressed by an equally powerful discourse of affirmation, acceptance and encouragement. Such communications will not happen automatically in a school system that has been only *physically* desegregated in order to make places for learners of all racial, religious and ethnic groups. While physical desegregation is obviously a necessary first step, it needs to be supplemented by a discourse of affirmation that needs to be taught to teachers who are entering the system for the first time as well as to those who are already ensconced in it. Just as the apartheid state *conditioned* its perpetrators and victims to accept various erroneous and morally debased messages about themselves and about their worth as human beings, so the “new South Africa” needs to devise and implement a powerful discourse of affirmation, acceptance and inclusion and to *condition* those who wish to be teachers in terms of this discourse so that it becomes an automatic and natural part of their behaviour and demeanour in classroom situations (Sayed, & Soudien, 2003a; & Moletsane, 1999).

When Van Heerden (1998) compared English- and Afrikaans-medium schools in his study, he gave examples of how communicative interactions used the assimilation approach in desegregated schools. He observed that because white schools had not made any major changes to accommodate black learners in their system, black students were compelled to adapt *their* behavioural patterns in schools and to become familiar with what were essentially white codes of communication. In order to survive and adapt themselves to what was an alien and challenging environment, all black learners who entered previously all-white schools had to strive to understand the culturally specific attitudes of their white teachers. These learners were required to pay attention in class, obey the rules and to demonstrate proper attitudes towards their schoolwork in the way in which they interacted with their teachers and other learners. Van Heerden also concluded that those black learners who were enrolled in Afrikaans schools were given the message in many different ways that they had to adapt to the prevailing Afrikaans culture of the school (Van Heerden, 1998).

These students' interactions with one another were such that they had to make an attempt to get along with one another for fear of being punished by teachers for racial incidents and because white learners were compelled to accept that black learners were now an inescapable part of their educational experience. This caused white students to establish patterns of interaction that lessened the potential for conflict by avoiding close contact with the black students in their vicinity (Meier, 2005; & Zafar, 1998). Van Heerden (1998) reported that he detected a greater willingness in the Afrikaans school he studied than in the English school to create conditions of understanding and acceptance together with a more balanced view of the attitudes and relationships that need to be established across racial and cultural boundaries. But he reported that wilful provocation was equally present among both black and white students.

Muhammad (2005) argues that children become saturated in all aspects of their family culture from early childhood. Children are taught what kinds of behaviour are appropriate for both formal and informal occasions, as well as the particular modes of communication by means of which the members of the family communicate with one another. Children are given their first lessons in family and community behaviour by their parents, and, later on, by their teachers, friends and fellow learners. In fact, children learn far more from their contemporaries as they grow older than

from members of their families. Muhammad invokes the English saying, “The child is the father of man” (Muhammad, 2005:353) to emphasise how children who grow up in families model themselves both consciously and unconsciously on the behaviour of their parents, sometimes to their detriment, and sometimes to their benefit.

As a child grows to adolescence and then to maturity, he/she is exposed to more and more influences from the wider world – to those from the peer group, the school and eventually to those from the workplace and the social environment. But whatever the conditions and the people the child encounters later in life, the lessons that are learned and imprinted in childhood are often the most powerful. If a learner therefore comes from a background in which he/she was taught that *all children should be seen and not heard*, as advocated by Lindeque and Vandeyar (2004) it will often be difficult for a learner to present his or her opinions in the context of group works in a classroom. Lindeque and Vandeyar (2004) draw special attention to the fact that teachers who are educating learners who have grown up in an atmosphere where *all children should be seen and not heard*, will have to make special arrangements and resort to a great deal of innovative thinking before they can make their classroom a place that is inclusive of all learners.

Research conducted by Cleary, et al. (2002) and Olivier, & du Plooy-Cilliers (2001) suggests that verbal communication and non-verbal communication must be *intentionally* initiated with learners if a teacher wants a particular message to be transmitted to the learners. When a teacher treats learners in such a way that it becomes evident that he/she is not actually expecting them to succeed, this is the message that will be communicated to the learners, and they will then perform in such a way that they will not reach their full potential. If, on the other hand, teachers make it evident that they are expecting learners to succeed, then this is the message that the teacher will communicate to the learners, and it is likely that they will indeed perform to the limits of their potential (Cleary, et al., 2002; & Olivier & du Plooy-Cilliers ,2001).

2.3. Models of communication

A model, in its broadest sense, as been described by Mortensen (1972) in the following words:

[A model is] a systematic representation of an object or event in an idealized and abstract form. They can also be

metaphors; they allow us to see one thing in terms of another (Mortensen 1972:10).

Because of the exponential growth rate in communication technologies in the past few decades, contemporary society in developed and developing countries is being characterized by an ever-growing volume of contacts between human beings who come from vastly different cultural backgrounds. While these communications can serve to improve understanding and sympathy across religious, racial and cultural barriers, they have just as much potential for creating conflict and misunderstandings – something that one sees every day in reports in international online newspapers and journals. There is a saying that goes, “To understand all, is to forgive all.” But one might say with equal justification, “To understand all is to be appalled and angered by everything that one has understood.” The volume of e-mails alone that is generated throughout the world every day of the year runs into millions. This is to leave out of account the even larger number of SMSs, electronic messages and telephone conversations between individuals from widely different cultures and backgrounds (West & Turner, 2006). The potential for confusion and misunderstanding that all this communication makes possible, justifies the need for communication models.

Communication models have evolved from models that were relatively simple to models that are both intricate and complex. What all these have in common is that they attempt to explain the elements and modes of human communication. It is counterproductive to designate a particular model as being either right or wrong because each model attempts to elucidate some aspect of the communication process from a particular perspective in the field of communication (Wood, 2002). I shall now briefly describe some of these models and attempt to show how they shed light on how trends in communication and how these trends evolved and developed over time.

2.3.1. Classical communication models

Communication theorists create models or simplified representations of complex interrelationships among the elements in a communication process, in an attempt to make it easier for others to understand the most important elements in a complex process. Although there are many communication models other than the ones that I have identified below, I have made the following selection of communication models from among those that are regarded as classical models

because they are more relevant to my study and not because they necessarily reflect a greater explanatory power than those that are not described here.

2.3.2. The transmission model

The earliest communication models were called *transmission models*. Lasswell's model of 1948 is a simple construct that was based on the assumption that the communicator wishes to *influence* the receiver because he regarded communication as a process of persuasion. This model designates what Lasswell called the source-message and the channel-receiver as the basic elements in a communication. The main criticism of Lasswell's model has been that it omitted to take the phenomenon of feedback into consideration (Lasswell, 1948,; & Wood, 2002).

The way in which Shannon and Weaver augmented and extended Lasswell's model of transmission has been highly influential in the history of communication studies. Shannon and Weaver (1949) made a clear distinction between source and transmitter, and between receiver and destination: they pointed out that there are different functions at the transmitting end and at the receiving end. The model of communication that they adopted and refined from Lasswell was only concerned with the transmission of knowledge. As far as they were concerned, it is *meaning* alone that is transmitted in a message. This transmission model was highly influential in the development of human communications in the 20th century. While the contribution made by Shannon and Weaver was recognized in fields such as information theory and cybernetics, it created some false trails in the study of human communication.

The main criticism of this model from the point of view of human communications theory is that it suggested that each communication process must have a beginning and an end, whereas contemporary scholars in communication regard all communication processes as endless or open-ended processes. Shannon and Weaver communication model also implies that it is a *person* who is the sender or the receiver of a message. This interpretation of communication fails to account for some of the other most important elements in any communication process. In the first instance, listeners are never simply passive recipients, especially when the information being conveyed is either verbal or non-verbal. This fact alone suggests that communication is more than a one-way

process. The limitations of the model produced by Shannon and Weaver led to the development of the next model, which is called the transactional model (West & Turner, 2004).

2.3.3 The transactional model

Gerbner (1956 as cited in Hybels & Weaver, 2004)) recognizes the transactional nature of communication that is implied by the intersubjectivity of communication. This model is constructed in terms of someone who perceives an event and reacts to a situation through some or other means to make materials available in the form of content that will produce consequences. The emphasis in this model is on perception, and it points out that communication is always a matter of negotiation between two parties that cannot be accurately predicted in advance.

Westley and MacLean (1957 as cited in Hybels & Weaver, 2004) point out that the transactional model reveals the complexities that are contained in modes of mass communication. This is why the analyses conducted in terms of this model have so many Xs in their equations – the Xs concerned are the events that are communicated in the media. The main criticisms of this model are that it oversimplifies the relationships between participants by neglecting the power relations that obtain between the participants. It was the limitations of this transactional model that ultimately led to the development of *the interpersonal communication model* (Hybels, & Weaver, 2004). It is this latter model that I chose as the theoretical framework for my study. (An extended discussion of this model will be presented in chapter 3.)

2.3.4 The interpersonal communication model

All the other models mentioned above interpreted interpersonal communication in different ways. The model that I chose for the theoretical framework of this study was designed by Osgood and Schramm (1954). The chief concern of Osgood and Schramm was to enable a more profound understanding of interpersonal communication. While Osgood and Schramm's model makes no claim to providing a comprehensive description of *all* forms of communication, it does give us an idea of how the communication process works and how our understanding of what is really happening is limited in many ways. This model emphasises the *channel* that one uses when one communicates, and the “noise” that can disturb and/or obscure a particular communication channel. Osgood and Schramm used the notion of a circular process to convey the idea that

communication is an ongoing process. The prominent features of Osgood and Schramm's model is its emphasis on identifying a person's field of experience as well as how the acquisition of an understanding of how a person's culture, experience and heredity may influence his or her ability to communicate with other people.

These particular emphases have vast implications for the interactions between teachers and learners. Osgood and Schramm emphasise the importance of heredity and life experience in the creation of an individual's personal frame of reference – a factor that is neglected in most other models of communication. Osgood and Schramm also emphasise the enormous misunderstandings that can arise between people who have grown up in different cultures and whose experience of life is very different from that of those with whom they are communicating. The value of their model is that they understand that each human being brings a unique field of reference to each communication event, and that these experiences cannot but fail to influence the course and quality of communication between two people.

The uniqueness of individual experience influences the way in which communicators meet one another, the format and success (or otherwise) of their communication, and the likelihood that their communications will produce satisfactory or unsatisfactory results. The future course of the relationship thus formed between two communicators is also dependent, not only on the unique life experiences and frames of reference of the parties to the communication, but also on the strength, honesty and satisfaction that their respective communications have created in one another (West & Turner, 2004; & Wood, 2002).

The main criticism of this model is that it assumes that it is two people who are speaking and listening to one another, even though it may not be at the same time.

2.4 The advantages of models

The first and most obvious advantage of using a model in communication is that a model offers a simplified representation of the complex elements of the communication process. This enables us to appreciate and isolate the essential elements in what may be an extremely complex communication process. But when we reduce the complexity of a natural communication to its

most essential elements, our aim in so doing is to expose the order and coherence that is present in any particular form of communication – and not just to offer any kind of reductionist explanation. The second advantage of a model is that it is rich in explanatory power and this allows us to ask questions in the way that will help us to understand both the overall structure of the communication and particular points in a communication about which we wish to ask questions that will help us to interpret the raw materials of our observations. The third advantage of a suitable model is that it can provide us with new and unexpected insights into what is happening in communications, and this enriches our understanding of the whole context in which the communication occurs (West & Turner, 2004; & Wood, 2002).

2.5. Limitations of models

The limitation of using a particular model arises from that it can lead to oversimplifications. By rigidly applying a particular model to a complex phenomenon, it is possible to distort the accuracy of its presentation by focusing on particular elements at the expense of others. In some cases, the reality of the phenomenon being explained can become so distorted that it can lead one to make unwarranted conclusions. The other danger of applying a particular model too rigidly to a phenomenon is that it can lead a researcher to prematurely call a halt to an important line of investigation that might have produced useful results if it had been extended further. Mortensen (1972) cites the example of how the designer of a model is apt to ignore certain aspects of a phenomenon that are not explained by the designer's model. When we apply any particular model too rigidly, we can be led to ignore vitally important aspects of the research phenomenon in which we are particularly interested, or to set limits to our interest in some of the unexplored possibilities of conceptualization.

2.6. The dark side of communication

By “dark side”, I am referring to the negative side of communication. While communication, at its worst, can be manipulative, sarcastic, abusive, and humiliating, it can also be couched in terms that may *seem* less harmful which in fact but may cause long-term damage. Such forms of less harmful like name calling, teasing. Such apparently innocuous activities are not, however innocuous at all, they are in fact a subtle form of bullying with long-term potential for harm. Name-calling or “teasing” are socially disguised forms of bullying, and bullies are always people

who target those whom they sense are vulnerable or unable to defend themselves. Has one ever heard of a weaker person bullying a stronger person, no matter what the context? (Wood, 2002; & West & Turner; 2004).

At its worst, name-calling or “teasing” should be regarded as an indicator of profound disrespect for the personal and social integrity and dignity of the recipient of the bullying, akin in seriousness to other recognised forms of abuse such as sexual or gender harassment. Name-calling or “teasing” may include verbal and psychological abuse, and racist, ageist, and homophobic remarks (West & Turner, 2004). But there are also many forms of bullying (most of them quite subtle) to which a researcher should be alert in his/her analysis of the data.

2.7. Justification of the study

The main research question that guided my study (namely, “How do learners from diverse backgrounds communicate and interact with each other and with their teachers?”) required a detailed examination and description of all the concomitant phenomena and subtle gradations of positive and negative emotions that accompanied the communications and interactions between the select group of participants in the case study. My analysis of the data was designed to elucidate and categorise the numerous ways in which the participant learners and teachers communicated with one another in the classroom setting, together with the processes that were involved in the communication process. The obvious focus of this analysis was the diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds of the teachers and learners as they interacted with one another in terms of verbal exchanges and in the presentation of meaningful body language.

The presentation of the theory that underlies communication in this chapter was a necessary prelude to the case study and the subsequent analysis of the data that emerged from it. The justification for this case study is that the whole of South African society is still afflicted by high levels of personal and institutional racism and racial and ethnic discrimination, and that this is especially true of the education system despite of government mandated a non-racial education system in terms of the South African Schools Act of 1996. The justification for the study is that it is necessary to accumulate data and draw conclusions from scientific evidence rather than to rely on anecdotal and informal sources of information or reportage. Once research has been done, it

will be possible to make recommendations about the ways in which it might be possible to reduce the incidence of racism in South African secondary education schools.

2.8. Conclusion

Communication is the means by which classroom interactions are effected. Teachers and learners play different roles in contributing towards effective communication in the classroom. It is possible to create a non-racist environment that is conducive to learning by means of verbal and non-verbal communication. While this is possible, the ideal of non-racism in classrooms, in extramural activities, and in contacts among learners outside the classroom environment, needs to be strongly and unambiguously endorsed by the management of every secondary school in the country. Teachers, learners and the parents of learners need to be able to witness and experience the application of non-racist and non-discriminatory policies in every aspect of school life and in everything that pertains to the interests of the school.

Any analysis of the communication and interactions between teachers and learners from diverse backgrounds and among learners and learners from different backgrounds needs to start from a conscious and definite acknowledgement of the great variety of differences that distinguish the members of one racial, ethnic or religious group in South Africa from others. The discussion in this chapter of the various models of communication from the earliest days of the discipline was a necessary prelude to the conduct of the case study and the subsequent analysis of the collected data. The discussion presented above emphasised the extent to which communication theory has evolved over the years in order to account for important aspects of communication that were overlooked in the earliest models of communication theory.

In the next follows (chapter 3) I will offer an overview of the contemporary understanding of communication and interactions in the secondary schools of a selection of countries throughout the world. In that chapter I will also summarise and offer information about the present status of the international scholarly debate about these phenomena.

CHAPTER 3

Communicative interactions in the desegregated classroom

3.1. Introduction

The chapter offers a review of the literature on communicative interaction in desegregated classrooms. It begins by describing the debates on this topic from the point of view of international studies and concludes with a presentation of the debate in South Africa.

The chapter will also describe the debates about communicative interaction and the extent to which various countries overseas have instituted communicative interaction at schools. Different countries have emphasised different aspects of communication and interaction in their classrooms. This review will examine contributions from the debates and policies in the following countries: the United States of America, Israel, Canada, Australia and the Netherlands. The rationale for choosing the countries was to select countries from western and eastern countries that have investigated communicative interactions in multiracial, multi-ethnic environments.

The discussion of the policies and practices that currently obtain in South Africa will touch on the following topics: current communicative approaches in the South African context, culture and communication in the South African classroom, perception in the learning environment, the interactions between teachers and learners, the issue of language in communication in South Africa, aspects of racial discourse in South Africa, issues of personal and collective identity in South Africa, the phenomenon of “white fright”, the appearance of a new form of South African “equality”, equal or unequal policy, various research findings from the South African point of view, and a comparison of the findings of international and South African scholars on this topic. This chapter will then describe the theoretical and conceptual framework that I have used to analyse the communicative interaction between teachers and learners in desegregated classrooms.

3.2. The international landscape

From an international academic point of view, the discourse that frames the communicative

interaction of learners from different backgrounds refers to learners who are different in terms of their cultural background and who therefore contribute to a multicultural, multiethnic educational setting in secondary school classrooms. The international landscape is a discussion of the countries that have contributed to communicative interaction in desegregated schools internationally. The following chapter will discuss the debates of what is happening internationally within the communicative interaction at schools. Different countries internationally practise communicative interaction in terms of different emphasis in the classroom and the influence of different policies in their education field. The discussions will include the following: debates in the United States of America, experiences in Israel, lesson from Canada, the Australian scenario, Netherland scenario and the findings of the international landscape. The research question that guides this research is: “How do learners from diverse racial backgrounds communicate and interact with each other and with their teachers at schools?”

Some researchers in this field such as (Slavin, 2002; De Jong, 2006; & Tatum; 1997) have observed that when a school becomes desegregated, the mere physical presence of learners from different races and different cultural and ethnic backgrounds will not *in itself* function to dismantle the racial barriers, or subvert the intensity with which the various beliefs about other racial and ethnic groups that the dominant group in particular holds. If anything, the highly ritualised and impersonal structure of a traditional secondary school might even encourage learners to remain within their own racial groups and to exclude the newcomers. This in itself has been observed to exert a definite impact on the way in which teachers and learners, and learners and learners, interact with one another.

Other authors such as Tatum (1997) and Brown and Hirst (2007) have taken this argument further by claiming that what happens within a classroom between learners and teachers is bound to stimulate an ongoing conversation among the various groups of students in the classroom itself – a conversation that begins in the classroom but expands to incorporate the opinions of the whole community and of society at large about the problems that arise in interactions between races and people from different racial, cultural and religious groups in society. When learners come into a classroom, they are not “empty vessels” (into which anything can be poured) or the *tabulae rasae* described by Locke (1996) (the “empty slates” on which anything can be written). Each learner

student reacts to his/her educational and personal environment from the point of view of a unique set of ideas, expectations, assumptions and preconceptions (not to mention the vantage point of their own home language). Within the secondary classroom environment, however, the teacher is the authorised expert on the content of the subject that is being taught as well as the officially appointed guardian of the explicit and unspoken “traditions” and policies of the school.

The teacher is also charged with maintaining order and discipline in the classroom environment and regulating relationships (far as they concern the business of the school) between one learner and another. Every time a teacher or a learner communicates or interacts with others within the classroom situation, the voice that is heard by others and that is projected by the speaker contains not only content but also a manner of speaking and self-projection that may contain layer upon layer of unspoken messages. The way in which teachers and learners speak, and the manner they present themselves to the others with whom they interact in classrooms, position them with regard to the authority framework that has been established within each classroom by many years of tradition and by innumerable (often unspoken) assumptions about the history, culture and ethos of the school as an historical institution that is representative of the society in which it exists (Slavin, 2002; Sanfeliz & Stalzer, 2003).

Such embedded messages and signals from the main authority figure in the class (the teacher) remain unproblematic as long as the composition of the body of learners in the classroom is homogenous in terms of culture, race, religion, discourse and expectations. But if teachers are suddenly confronted by a class of students from cultural and racial backgrounds that are different from their own, they need to revise their assumptions and extend the range of their sympathy and understanding in order to cope sympathetically with the variety of new elements that has entered what was previously a relatively stable situation. Such teachers need time in which to reflect on their own behaviour, prejudices and attitudes with regard to other races and cultural groups in order to be effective communicators with all learners, including those from other racial and cultural groups who would have recently been admitted to the classroom. Most teachers are unable to practise this kind of structured introspection by themselves and it would require a dedicated programme to prepare them for the problems that arise when a previously homogenous group is

transformed into a group that contains many heterogeneous elements and assumptions (Lupi & Tong, 2001; Zhao & Bitchener, 2007), .

In those situations where the culture of the school is radically different from the culture that learners have internalised from their own parents and communities, it also becomes necessary for teachers to acquire a sensitive understanding of the rules by which the cultural values, norms, and attitudes of learners are communicated to others and to authority figures, as well as the unspoken rules that regulate successful discourse and communication between members of their groups and their community (Lupi & Tong, 2001). Dornyei and Kormos (as cited in Mackey, 2002), have suggested that a sympathetic and understanding attitude on the part of the teacher will undoubtedly enable most learners to be willing to participate and communicate in the classroom to whatever extent they are able. But such attitudes (admirable and necessary though they are in themselves) are insufficient to ensure untroubled communications among racially, culturally and ethnically diverse learners, especially in classrooms where racist attitudes are deeply embedded in learners and where there is a history of racist conflict and structural injustices in the very fabric of the society itself. Although this will be discussed in much greater detail in the pages to come, it suffices for the present to note that learners may be hindered in their educational experience if their expectations are not met and their frames of reference are misunderstood by the teacher in charge of the classroom and by learners from other racial and ethnic groups (Mackey, 2002).

Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) claim that the expectations that teachers have of particular learners are determined by the prejudices and assumptions (whether positive or negative) that such teachers entertain about the racial and ethnic group to which a particular learner belongs. While such prejudices and assumptions may be entirely positive, it is far more likely that many of them will exert a negative influence over teachers' perception of learners who belong to a racial and ethnic group that is different from their own. Although many such prejudices and assumptions are built on the wider prejudices and assumptions of the ethnic and racial group to which a teacher belongs, they decisively influence the way in which a teacher communicates and interacts with learners from other groups. Some researchers (Coates, 1972; & Sbarra & Pianta, 2001), for example, have produced evidence that American teachers have much more developed and positive expectations of the European-descended American students they teach than they have of African American

students and students of Mexican descent (Coates, 1972; Sbarra & Pianta, 2001). Other researchers have observed that teachers are far more positive in their attitudes towards Asian America learners than towards American learners of European descent (Chang & Sue, 2003).

These findings have definite implications for understanding the interactions that take place between teachers and learners in a classroom. One of the implications of these findings is that if teachers have high expectations of particular learners, it is more than likely that they will interact positively with those learners. This will become evident in the actions and reactions of the teachers concerned. The teacher who thinks highly of particular learners will, for example, praise those learners more frequently, transmit non-verbal messages of appreciation to them, encourage them more frequently, and will, all in all, direct a far greater number of positive and neutral messages toward such students. These students will, in turn, tend to strive to live up to the expectations of the teacher. But if a teacher entertains low expectations of particular learners (whose self-esteem may already been compromised), he/she may project and affirm his/her negative opinions about such learners by engaging in any of the following actions: turning away from such learners in the classroom so that they are effectively ignored and excluded, calling them names or attributing qualities to them that humiliate them, deliberately embarrassing them in front of their classmates, giving them fewer opportunities to respond to questions in class, and giving them far less positive feedback on the whole than is given to favoured learners. In some cases, “teachers have even been observed to ask their preferred learners to correct the work and tasks of their less preferred learners – but never vice versa” (Bloome & Golden, 1982:218). There is research evidence to suggest that the numbers of opportunities that learners are given to respond publicly in a classroom are not equal for all groups of students. Good (1970) has presented a detailed analysis in his study of some of the subtle processes that predispose teachers to call on one group of students more frequently than on another group. He concluded that low achievers are given far fewer opportunities to respond publicly in a classroom than high achievers because low achievers are far more likely to impede the progress of the lesson and interrupt the flow of the pedagogical processes in the classroom.

Researchers have also determined that the teachers’ beliefs and prejudices are communicated in subtle ways that influence the communication and interaction that takes place in the classroom.

Such beliefs and prejudices send a clear message to those learners who are less favoured by the teacher that they are *not good enough* and that they are *unwelcome* in a classroom because they do not fit in with the ethos and standards of the classroom and the curriculum. These messages, which are often verbal but which are more frequently conveyed by subtle forms of body language and facial expression, cannot but have a deeply discouraging effect on the learners concerned (Good, 1970).

The research conducted by Irvine (1986) shows that teacher-student interactions are part of a two-way process in which each participant influences the behaviour of the other. Irvine shows that the behaviour of the student conditions the behaviour of the teacher just as much as the behaviour of the teacher conditions the behaviour of the student. Brophy and Evertson (as cited in Irvine, 1986), point out that this process is not a one-sided relationship in which an active and initiating teacher shapes and determines the behaviour and attitudes of a passive and receptive student. They also observed that the more active and initiating students are, the more likely they are to be accurately observed by the teacher. Less active students behave in ways that sustain inappropriate expectations on the part of the teacher because their contact with the teacher is far more infrequent and because the teacher has less of a relationship with such students.

3.2.1. The debate in the United States of America

In the United States of America, the ongoing debate about communicative interaction in desegregated classrooms, initially endorsed an *assimilationist* approach for dealing with the diverse ethnic groups that are present as learners in the American classroom population. This policy of assimilation required the minority group to adopt the language, values and cultural modes of the dominant group to the exclusion of its own (Athimoolan, 2002; Shealey, Lue, Brooks & McCray, 2005; & Parker 2008).

At school level professional teachers and administrators believe that they know how to handle interracial situations, [although] they are uncomfortable [when] talking about race and [although they] assume they are fair and treat all students the same, often with little knowledge and no training in cultural differences or in methods for reaching across the lines of social division and producing classroom interaction (Orfield, 2004:111).

It would appear that such teachers devote time to thinking about how they may be perceived by learners from different racial and ethnic groups, about what it means to be a teacher across racial and ethnic lines, about the necessity for treating every learner equally across racial divides in the classroom, about the possibility and incidence of cultural misunderstandings across racial divides, and about how to improve their current relationship with their students (Orfield, 2004, cited in Nkomo, Mckinney, & Chisholm, 2004; & Tatum, 1997). Such attitudes have implications for the quality of interaction that teachers have with their students. One of these implications might be that these teachers are unwilling to invest time and effort in the backgrounds of learners who have different backgrounds from their own. Tatum (1997) reports an incident of this kind in his research. He describes how a black student had a conversation with his English teacher (whom he liked and respected) about possible career goals. Since this student wanted to become a lawyer, he asked his teacher about the advisability of such a career for himself. The teacher responded by saying “That’s not a realistic goal for a nigger”, and went on to advise him to consider becoming a carpenter. Tatum reports that “the student’s reaction was one of anger, confusion, and alienation” Tatum (1997: 58). Since the student concerned liked and respected the teacher who uttered these words, one wonders what kind of response he may have received from a teacher whom he neither liked nor respected. The message that the student received from these words was that because he was a black male in the United States of America and that because the racial group to which a person belongs exerts an important effect upon the life of an individual in the United States, he would be well advised not even to dream about becoming a lawyer because to become a successful lawyer was not within the grasp of people from his ethnic group.

In the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education* that was heard by the United States Supreme Court in 1954, the court ruled that separate educational facilities are inherently equal and thus unconstitutional, thereby bringing to an end centuries of separate education for members of different race groups in the United States (Willie, 2004; Banks, 1987; & Shealey, Lue, Brooks & McCray, 2005). This landmark ruling initiated a process of assimilation of black learners into previously all-white schools in the United States. But because of a great deal of resistance to the ideal of assimilation on the part of blacks in United States, the policy of assimilation was later replaced by a policy of multicultural education. Multicultural education will be discussed in detail later in these pages.

Further research conducted by Nieto (2002) in the United States shows that teachers and students have been socialized to think of language diversity as a negative rather than positive condition. The majority of inhabitants of the United States are able, to a greater or lesser extent, to speak and write the language of power and communication, which is English. Since English is the lingua franca of communication in the United States, a certain stigma attaches to speaking a language other than English, particularly in public (even though it may be one's own home language). This English-only attitude communicates a disempowering message to members of other racial groups such as Hispanics, whose mother tongue is Spanish. Roberts, Bell, & Salend (1991:133) gave an example,

that Japanese – American students may refrain from expressing opinions, speaking out, asking questions, seeking clarifications, and making eye contact. Schools that hold monocultural assumptions may interpret such behaviours as communication difficulties that signify the need for special education. Instead of viewing this behaviour as consistent with a cultural upbringing and communication styles where such behaviour signifies respect for elders

Mother tongues other than English in the United States are often associated with low prestige, poor living conditions, squalid socio-economic conditions, high crime rates and limited access to power and prestige. This is especially true for people who do not speak English well or who speak it with an accent. Such people are often regarded as incompetent by American speakers of English. In a classroom situation, an imperfect mastery of English or a discernible foreign accent (such as a Spanish accent) might well cause a teacher to misjudge a student as dull, unschooled, inept and incompetent, and it may indeed be the cause of various forms of miscommunication or barriers that hinder efficient communication between such a student and teacher even more (Roberts, et al., 1991; Lappin, & White-Clark, 2007).

Tatum (1997) and Nieto (2002) have further observed that language diversity is a vital component of our overall understanding of diversity. It is evident from their studies that the issues of power and status that derive from the use of a dominant language, need to be taken into account in reconceptualising our understanding of language diversity. What this means is that we need to develop awareness that privilege, ethnocentrism and racism are at the core of policies and

practices that limit the use of languages other than the officially recognized high-status language (English) that is universally used in schools and in American society and institutions in general. When particular languages are prohibited in the language of public discourse in a country, the voices of those who speak them are silenced and rejected. Even well-meaning and progressive teachers may feel that their students' fluency in other languages is a handicap and a hindrance to their fluency and progress in mastering the use of English. Such teachers may regard it as an important responsibility to help such students become assimilated to the lingua franca that is in general use in classrooms and in their society as a whole. When such teachers punish students for speaking in their home language or when they send notes to their parents (who themselves can barely speak English) to warn them not to communicate with their children in their home language, this creates barriers in communication (Tatum, 1997; & Nieto, 2002).

The body of research conducted by Nieto has important implications for teachers and students who are required to interact in classroom settings. The students whose cultures and languages are most valued pick up affirming messages about their personal and cultural worth. But the opposite is true for students whose languages are less valued in the society in which they live. Hispanics are the case in point in the United States. What is mainly communicated to them when they revert to Spanish are messages that make them feel unworthy, undervalued and essentially alien in the culture that prevails in the Anglophone schools of the United States (Nieto, 2002). Schultz, Buck, Niesz, (2000) argue that conversation about different race in mixed setting are difficult and teachers and learner preferred not to address them but to tiptoe around the subject of race so as to avoid conflict.

Research conducted by Villegas and Lucas cited in Hyland (2005), emphasises that most urban schools in the USA are staffed by a majority of white teachers, and although the number of learners from historically marginalized racial groups continues to grow dramatically from year to year in these schools. At the same time, black learners and Hispanic learners continue to lag significantly behind their peers in the standardized tests scores and in high school graduation rates (Villegas & Lucas, cited in Hyland, 2005).

Several researchers in United States have identified and described the conditions that must be present if the contacts that take place are to be of such an order that they will enhance intergroup relationships. The most important of these conditions is that equal status must be accorded to all members from other racial and ethnic groups in all contact situations. In other words, teachers have to accept that all students have the same dignity, personal rights, value and status within the classroom. The second important condition is that cooperative interdependency among the members of different racial and ethnic groups should prevail in a classroom. In other words, students should be compelled to work in groups that are composed of mixed races from different backgrounds. The third important condition is that the support accorded to positive relations and equal status within the contact situation should be normative within a classroom. When such conditions are conscientiously applied, they subvert and disconfirm the racial and cultural stereotypes that are traditional in American society, while at the same time encouraging and facilitating the transmission of individuating information about all members of all the groups that are present in the classroom (Banks, 1987; Marcus-Newhall & Heindl, 1998; & Slavin, 2002).

Slavin (2002) claims that schools also function as one of the sources of social experiences for a child and that children acquire crucial social skills through interacting with their classmates. He further argues that the nature and type of these interactions serve to extend and strengthen the relationships that children enjoy in the classroom and the school context on a daily basis. The way in which students perceive their school's interracial atmosphere influences the coping mechanisms that they learn in order to adopt as well as their levels of self-esteem (Slavin, 2002).

Research undertaken by Jo (2004) into Asians learners in the United States interrogates the issue of acceptance of diversity without a correspondingly critical examination of the racial politics of classrooms and of a society that reinforces "white supremacy" in many different ways. He further notes that the racial issues that are interrogated focus almost exclusively on black and white issues and that they ignore the complexity of the problems that affect other racial minorities (in the case of his research, he was referring to citizens of Asian origin). Jo also notes that people from historically marginalized groups have no power to represent themselves as they indeed are or would like to be, and that their representations of themselves are always mediated through the (often hostile) perceptions of others.

Jo (2004) was also of the opinion that the perception of minority Asians in the United States was dehumanized by deliberate distortions that made them appear to be superhuman in the sense that they were portrayed as supernaturally intelligent (and therefore potentially evil) people. The destructive obverse of this characterisation was that they were also “deeply and naturally evil”. Asians were therefore ruined by the force of this widely believed and dehumanising caricature of their true selves. It is an enduring caricature that has for decades affected the relationship between Asians and non-Asians in United States because it has been used as a hegemonic device that has concealed the heterogeneity of Asians from the public view. To recognise the truth of the matter (that Asians are as heterogeneous as any other population or racial group) would be to empower them and so to render them even more of a threat to the mainly white group with whom they are in competition.

Some researchers show that other hegemonic models that have been constructed have also ironically affected the perception that *Asians* have of other minority groups such as African Americans who have been similarly caricatured in the collective consciousness of Americans. African American men, for example, are portrayed as being abnormally sexually potent and predatory. They are also characterised as being exceptionally intelligent, persistent and devious in the pursuit of satisfying their alleged perverted appetites and criminal activities. This is yet another example of racial and ethnic stereotypes and the way in which they insult and disempower members of groups who do not belong to the ascendant racial and ethnic group in a particular society. Since all the racial and ethnic groups in American society are, in varying degrees, in competition with one another, there is some kind of survival value in portraying other disadvantaged groups as somehow abnormal, evil, unreliable, super-intelligent and so on (Shin, 2001; & Parameswaran, 2007)

These racial and ethnic caricatures, which are widely believed in United States – even if it is only on a subconscious level by most Americans, are useful to members of the dominant ethnic and linguistic group because they reinforce the hegemonic status and privileges of the dominant group by disempowering and subverting those whom they regard as being in opposition to themselves. Another strange phenomenon is that some Asians will buy into the myths that are perpetrated by

racial and ethnic modelling. This allows them to look down on the other racial minorities with whom they are competing instead of challenging the implicit racism and irrationality of the existing order. This kind of practice enables some people to enjoy a level of comfort and prestige in the power relations of the dominant society, even though it may cause a conflict between the Asians who support such absurdity and the African American who are stigmatised by them (Shin, 2001; & Parameswaran, 2007)

In schools, for example, Asian students (who are mainly descendants of Chinese and Japanese immigrants) are often regarded as “nerds” or “eggheads” – that frequently makes them targets of verbal and physical violence. The research of the Korean educator, Shin (2001), produced evidence that each group of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds entertained stereotypes about members of other racial and ethnic groups. Thus, for example, many American children thought that every Asian man was skilled in karate while Korean children, on the other hand, believed that every American man carried a concealed gun. There can be no doubt that these children were influenced in their beliefs by a whole range of stereotypes that they had heard or observed in widely different contexts such as, for example, films, comic books and the jokes that were being bandied about in their group (Shin, 2001).

The status and position of Asians who have become citizens of the United States of America are ambiguous and to some extent uncertain because while they reside inside the United States of America, they remain politically and culturally outside of the racial arena. This observation was given added weight by Tuan’s study of Asians (1998). Tuan reported that the participants in his study still positioned themselves as “others” because they still feel alien in the United States despite the fact that they know nothing about their ancestral and cultural heritage or about the country from which their ancestors emigrated to the United States. Ong (2000) observes that Asian racial discourse in the United States contributes to racist race relations in three different ways (Ong, 2000). First, it adds an ethnic dimension to what they regard as a cultural and language issue. Second, it adds issues of class (such as poverty and the prevalence of “glass ceilings” in the job market). Finally, it functions to promote the internalisation of race relations. This means that race relationships have been increasingly affected by the political rhetoric of national security in the United States and in global geopolitics. The purpose behind this, according to Ong (2000), is

to effectively destabilize and subvert the dominant racial and linguistic ideologies that determine and influence public discourse in the United States.

On a more positive note, research undertaken by Orfield (2002) detected some signs of hope for progress in the normalisation of intergroup relations. This school is situated in a state and neighbourhood that has experienced high levels of desegregation in housing and schools in spite of the prevalence of ongoing ethnic divisions and stereotyping. But despite the negative environment in which the school operates, the data was able to report that the learners from this school did not feel that they were being poorly treated either by staff or by other students, and that they themselves entertained no hostile or resentful attitudes towards students who were members of other racial and ethnic groups. The respondents in the study attributed the fact of their positive interactions to the successful incorporation of learners of all racial and ethnic groups into the academic life of school. Tenenbaum, & Ruck (2007) explain further that positive and neutral speech referring to speech that is encouraging (praising , affirmation) or neutral (product or processes question) are beneficial to all students such that they must be encouraged in the classroom for conducive learning.

Since the success of students depends to a great extent on whether such students feel that their teachers actually care about their academic success, the presence of just such attitudes in the staff of the school seems to be the cause of the successes that have been attained by this school. The researchers observed that the teachers in the sample were exceptionally conscientious about encouraging students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds without any reference to their personal identity or racial origins. In other words, all the students of the school were encouraged without any reference ever being made to some of the humiliating and destructive racial and ethnic stereotypes that pervade American public life. The students were also eager to give credit to their school for the valuable experiences and inspiration that they felt had contributed to their ability to work with, appreciate and to understand, people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. One of these students expressed the following opinion that could be said to be representative of most of the other students in Cambridge Public High School:

I have not only grown very comfortable with other people from different racial or ethnic groups, but I have learned to

be excited and interested in such difference[s]. (Orfield, 2002: 6)

Another student confessed that while his experience in this school had made him aware of the importance and dignity of other students from other racial and ethnic groups, he still remained true to his own heritage and beliefs. This seems to be the ideal state of mind to which all other ideals of racial and ethnic harmony, cooperation and mutual respect contribute: a profound and sensitive respect for the differences and needs of members of other racial and ethnic groups while retaining a healthy, open and honest respect for one's own tradition, language and cultural heritage. This agrees with research findings by Schultz, et al, (2000) who argue that there is a need to engage students and adults in deep and sometimes painful and conflicting conversations about their daily school lives. As a result of the conversations the students broke the silence about race and talked about its significance to their own identity formation, in their relationships with others and in their own lives.

In order to encourage effective communication and interaction in schools, curriculum designers must construct a curriculum that reflects the many voices that participate in the creation and construction of educative knowledge and experience (Banks, 1991; Orfield, 2002; & Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Banks (1991) also advocates the idea that equality can be furthered in education through the implementation of multicultural education. Research conducted in American schools suggests that African American as well as white American teachers subscribe to a “colour-blind” attitude to learners that will enable their institution to impart middle class values and modes of behaviour to lower-class learners (Tate, 1997). Tate recommends this as a way of helping learners to break out of the cycle of poverty and self-denigration so that they can ultimately position themselves to become members of the American middle class rather than the stigmatised underclass to which African Americans are habitually thought to belong. While the so-called lower class learners to whom the researcher was referring were African Americans, he nevertheless regarded their race as purely incidental to the anticipated class assimilation process that was envisaged by this recommendation (Tate, 1997).

Schultz, Buck, & Niesz (2000) and Damico & Sparks (1986) all argued that a standardised kind of democratic public education in America could make good use of desegregated schools. Such

schools, they believed, would allow other races and ethnic groups to improve their levels of academic achievement and their communication skills and this, they believed, would result in the kind of economic and social success that had previously been the preserve of members of the American white middle class. These proponents of desegregation pointed out that, by attending white schools, black students could learn the codes of white middle-class behaviour and that this would improve their opportunities of becoming successful members of a society that is dominated by white middle class codes. The subtext of this argument is that black American students have nothing of value to offer their white counterparts. Unfortunately, these same advocates of desegregation failed to anticipate how the elimination of racially segregated schools might be instrumental in unleashing the deep-seated but largely unexamined and unconscious racism that was the order of the day in the institutions to which these black students were sent.

Schultz , et al.,(2000) and Damico & Sparks (1986) also further advance their argument by stating that black and white “children sitting side by side in schoolroom might translate to integration in the classroom and ultimately in the society at large” .Schultz et al.,. (2000) and Damico & Sparks, (1986) advocated the benefits of desegregated education were also quick to also acknowledge that desegregated education in what is essentially a racist society would require careful preparation. Schultz, et al.,(2000: 44). wrote: “[Having students seated] side by side did not mean that teachers had an understanding of the most effective ways to reach a multiracial setting or knowledge about how to mediate relationship among black and white students” (Schultz, Buck & Niesz, 2000:44).

Schultz et al. (2000) and Tenenbaum & Ruck (2007)) acknowledged that black students entering desegregated schools in the United States would be required to leave the schools in which they were anchored in their communities and in which they had teachers who were committed to them and their future, and to enter schools in which (white) teachers would have little understanding or respect for their culture, their history or their potential as individuals and scholars. All these factors would make it far more difficult for such students to cooperate in the assimilation process that had been designed for their benefit. It was also undeniable that the teachers in these envisaged desegregated schools would be predominantly white and that they would therefore have lower expectations for their new black students. The white students in these schools would also have had little or no experience of interacting with their new (black) peers, and the resultant

misunderstandings, misinterpretations and friction could very well bring the racism that characterises American society as a whole into the classroom (Schultz et al., 2000 & Tenenbaum & Ruck (2007)

Research also illustrates that in America teacher–student interaction shows that teachers are underprepared to teach learners from diverse background, particularly in mixed race settings. In their interactions, teachers tend to separate students by their race, gender and socio economic status, which continue to be reified by policies at the school. Simpson & Erickson (1983) observed that white teachers directed more verbal praise and criticisms towards boys than girls; however black boys received more non verbal criticisms than did black girls, white girls or white boys. Black male students interacted more with teachers than do white or female students both in terms of academic and personal contacts. The study also shows that social class of the students influence the teachers' expectations. Teachers tended to expect less from students who came from low social class, compared to the middle class students. Aaron and Powell's (1982) study supported these findings. They concluded that black pupils receive more negative academic and behaviour feedback than do whites.

Orfield, (2004) observes that students are segregated by race and class. High poverty schools usually experience a lack of resources, experienced and credentialed teachers, lower parental involvement, and high turnover rates. Black students attended schools with far more poor children than whites. Orfield (2004) further pointed that almost half of all schools had very few black and Latinos, less than a tenth. Five out of six of those segregated white schools had middle –class majorities. In contrast to almost nine-tenths of intensely segregated black and Latino schools (86 percent) had a majority of poor children eligible for subsidised lunches. Orfield proposed that this relationship between social class and race often leads both observers and participants to confuse the effects of class and race and attribute gains resulted from attending white schools to race when they may be products of middle class advantages and networking, while attributing to minority culture problems that may be the result of poverty (Orfield, 2004).

Brown and Hirst (2007: 19) concluded in their findings that what takes place between students, and between the teacher and students within the classroom, may be said to have the potential to

initiate students into ever expanding conversations. Conversations which goes beyond the walls of the classroom to engage socio-cultural practices.

3.2.1.1. Multicultural education

Researchers into communication and interactions in secondary school education in the United States of America have recommended the widespread adoption of multicultural education. This term originated in the post-civil-rights era when different ethnic, racial and linguistic groups were eager to have their previously neglected experiences and points of view included in curricula (Banks, 1987; & Jo, 2004). Multicultural education is concerned with how social and economic inequalities are played out in the broader culture of the educational system. Multicultural education is also concerned with how the different backgrounds and cultural assumptions of teachers and learners affect their personal understanding and interpretation of knowledge, and the way in which they communicate and interact with others in the school setting (Banks, 1987; Roberts, Bell, & Salend; 1991; & Orfield, 2004).

Subject content that is consonant with the philosophy of multicultural education will provide information and methods for understanding the history and culture of the different groups that comprise the educational system. It will also include references to the wealth of resources that are available for creating multicultural classrooms and curricula that promote gender equality and justice. An ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal communication styles is a necessary skill for working with or teaching individuals who are different from one another in race, culture and religion. American society came to regard multicultural education as a vehicle that would be able to effect the empowerment, inclusion and participation of all these different people in the social, economic, political resources of their country (Banks, 1987; Roberts, Bell, & Salend, 1991).

Schultz, et al., (2000: 34) assert that people in multiracial contexts often fear that they might unintentionally offend one another by “misspeaking”. Because of this fear, they treat the topic of race with the utmost circumspection and quickly change the topic whenever it arises in conversation or in interactions. Sometimes there is a tacit agreement between teachers and students that they will all remain silent on the topic of race and avoid any references to it or related

subjects that might stimulate conflict or disagreement. The advocates of multicultural education emphasise, by contrast, that it is critically important to encourage students and teachers to observe and reflect upon the power dynamics that shape their many conversations and interactions. Multiculturalists agree that individuals should develop their powers of analysis so that they can become effectively critical of the events of their lives and their social interactions (Banks & Banks, 2004; & Tiedt & Tiedt, 1990).

3.2.1.2. Criticisms of multicultural education

Multicultural education has been criticised by black parents and teachers on the grounds that the eradication of separate and unequal schools would not necessarily translate into the elimination of institutionalized racism in education and in society at large. The mere fact that black and white learners are seated side by side in a classroom does not mean that their teachers have any understanding or appreciation of the most effective ways to interact and teach in a multicultural setting or that they are skilled in mediating relationships among black and white learners. Some research has found that contact across racial groups does not necessarily result in any change of attitudes or beliefs. The main criticism of multicultural education is that it attempts to solve the problems of race, discrimination, inequality and prejudice at a very superficial level and that it does not necessarily eliminate the root problem of intolerance among people from diverse backgrounds (Robert, et al, 1991; & Orfield, 2004).

Multicultural education was introduced as a way of encouraging teachers and learners to reflect critically and to identify and analyse the power dynamics that shape their many conversations and interactions in their classrooms (Banks, 1987; Banks & Banks, 1995; & Slavin, 2002).

3.2.2. Experiences in Israel

There was a wave of mass immigration of Jews to Israel in the 1950s. During that decade, over a million Jews emigrated from the Moslem-dominated countries of the Middle East, and these were joined by over one million Jewish immigrants from Russia and all the countries of Eastern and Western Europe, from North and South America, from England and South Africa. Among these immigrants were Jews who had lived in the Middle East for centuries. They included Jews from Morocco, Iran and Yemen and from other enclaves on the eastern and southern areas of the

Persian Gulf. Regardless of their cultural background, all these immigrants shared a Jewish identity because they were descended from Jewish lineage. When they arrived in Israel, they comprised of the Ashkenazim (the “Germanics”) and the Sephardim (the “Hispanics”) the Mizrahim – “Easterners” or Jews from the Middle East. (Shachar & Sharan, 1995; & Amir, & Sharan, 1984)

Mizrahi Jewish children constitute close to 60% of the total school population in Israel, and they are the ones who are being referred to when Israeli researchers and policy makers speak about “desegregation” and “ethnic integration” in schools (Shachar & Sharan, 1995; & Amir, & Sharan, 1984). It appears that the difficulties experienced by these different groups were less evident in Israel than in other countries because of the powerful bonds of the common religion that enables all Jews (no matter what their ethnic background) to enjoy a common identity. But all Jews, in fact, identify themselves as belonging to the same people because they are all genetically descended from Jews whose history is recorded in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. The communications and interactions of teachers and learners in Israel are therefore informed by the common goal of creating a climate of acceptance among the different cultural and ethnic groups that constitute the population of Israel. Although some learners are strongly orientated towards Western culture, the identity of Israel as a country is predicated on a multicultural model (Shachar & Sharan, 1995; & Amir, & Sharan, 1984)

3.2.3. Lessons from Canada

The history of Canada reflects a long struggle between two powerful European nations and two influential European language, cultural and ethnic groups: the British and French (Kamal, Donaldson, & Turcotte, 2008). The tension that has resulted from this struggle over the years is predicated on the cultural diversity of these two dominant white cultures of Canada. Because of this, Canada is currently more like South Africa was before 1994 when it comprised two competing but dominant cultures that united to suppress “the Others” (Gosine, 2002).

Canada has also adopted an assimilationist policy in its attempt to meet the challenges of an ethnically diverse society. The declared purpose of this policy was to promote and nurture diversity in Canadian society and to implement measures that would allow a multicultural

approach to permeate all aspects of Canadian life (Kamal, et al, 2008; & James 1997). Canadians also believe that immigrants have a duty to become an assimilated or “more like us” if they wish to remain in Canada, Canadian identity (Joseph, Kirova, & Wong, 2008). The declared mission of public education in Canada since its inception in 1847 was to instil “patriotism” into Canadian youth. Schools therefore function as a homogenizing influence that works on immigrants and native-born children and their families to create “good citizens “in the form of “British loyalists”.

In the execution of this policy, teachers interact with learners in schools with the purpose of indoctrinating them (the immigrants) and to enable them to acquire a Canadian identity and values and attitudes as quickly as possible. Immigrants are therefore expected to take on many of beliefs and values of the dominant white culture, including the unspoken belief that it is better to be white (Joseph, Kirova, & Wong, 2008; & Roediger, 2002,). The stereotypes, omissions, and distortions of reality that reinforce the idea of white superiority are therefore instilled into black as well as white children. The function of this policy is to socialise both immigrant children as well as the children of Canadian citizens into a Eurocentric culture. It has been observed that many black children in Canada begin to value the role models, lifestyles, and images of beauty that are represented by the dominant group more highly than those of their own cultural group (Zine , 2001; & Joseph, et al., 2008).

A case study of Muslim youth in Canada done by Zine (2001) found that the challenges of Muslim youth are based on social differences, race, gender and religious identity. All participants had lived in Canada for more than 10 years or students were Canadian born from middle –lower- income families. The teacher–student interaction and student–student interaction was compounded by racism, and Islamophobia. The school adopted an assimilation approach as a way to deal with minority group. One of the students pointed out:

There are a lot of challenges because I think it’s natural to want to be accepted when you are growing up and when you’re young and you don’t really have an identity. Because first you’re Indian and then living in a white society and you’re trying to be accepted, but at the same time you want to be practicing Islam. It’s a big struggle until you get a very strong identity as a Muslim and it takes a lot of years to build up. Trying to fit in is hard thing to get over it, but once you get over it, you’re very strong (Zine, 2001: 404)

The need to gain acceptance as the student points out, is particularly important among minority group. Muslim students are struggling to negotiate an identity, within three conflicting cultures, the dominant culture, their ethnic culture and Islam.

The gender interaction was another challenge for Muslim students, as mixing between members of the opposite sex is limited within Islamic tradition. Physical contact is only allowed among close families. Male and female students are not allowed contact with one another. Zine (2001) reported that learners were discriminated by teachers and learners as they subscribed as “others”. He concluded that low expectations of Muslim students by the teachers are informed by negative racialized stereotypes and negative assumptions about Islam (Zine, 2001).

3.2.4. The policy of the Australian government

Australia shares with the United States of America a history of white subjugation of the original inhabitants of the land (the Aborigines). Very limited numbers of immigrants from other racial and ethnic groups were permitted to emigrate to Australia until fairly recently. This policy of emigration ensured that Australia would remain a country in which the majority of the immigrants were white. This in turn ensured the ascendancy of the established white European-based, English-speaking culture over other cultures represented in the country. In order to cope with the diversity of cultures and languages in a common education system, the Australian government adopted a policy of assimilationism in order to accommodate the multiplicity of immigrants who had emigrated to Australia from all corners of the globe, especially before and after the Second World War (Liddicoat, 2008; & Chiang, & Yang, 2008). But when the Australian government later introduced various reforms into its education system, it opted for a multicultural approach to education that would accommodate the diverse needs of an increasingly multicultural and multi-ethnic population of learners. The assimilation approach was designed to redress the social and cultural imbalances created by social segregation in Australian society (Liddicoat, 2008; & Chiang, & Yang, 2008).

The case study of Teese, & Polesel (2003) was located in the depressed outer suburbs of a large Australian capital city. The school served an economically and socially depressed community.

The literature shows that despite the student and teachers circumstances, in their interaction with one another they are very positive. The main reason given for the positive attitude was attributed to positive interaction of teachers and learners and hard work of the teachers.

3.2.5. Education policies in the Netherlands

De Haan and Elbers (2005) after research conducted in the Netherlands explained the structural and culturalist diversity that they observed in Dutch society. The culturalist explanation is sometimes referred to as the “culturalist discontinuity approach” because it explains diversity in classrooms in terms of the diversities in the “home socialization” of learners who enter the schooling system. These explanations are predicated on an environment in which the more teachers and learners differ in their original domestic socialization patterns, the more differences they will exhibit in the school environment. The greater these differences, the greater will be the difficulties that learners will experience when they attempt to adapt to the prevailing school culture, and the less likely they will be successful in their schools. The meaning of the term “diversity” in this explanation is purely cultural because it implies that the socialization process of members that belong to different cultural groups will produce particular meanings and forms of behaviour that are typical of the particular group being referred to. These differences will make communication and interactions between learners and teachers, and learners and learners, problematic unless teachers have been trained to recognise, respect and cope with the kind of cultural and ethnic differences referred to in this explanation.

The structuralist explanation, on the other hand, regards differences from the perspective of social reproduction. The differences between social groups are therefore analysed from a more critical and political perspective. The focus of the structuralist critique is on the power relations that prevail in schools and the inequalities that have been long established in Dutch society. Since these inequalities are played out in schools, schools are regarded by structuralists as one of the most important places in which existing power relationships can either be confirmed or reconstructed in the context of social relationships that are never neutral but that reflect the inequalities that are already well established in Dutch society. Language is another contributing factor towards non communicative interaction between teachers and learners. Bezemer (2003) observed the implications of mother tongue teaching are that learners speak another language at

home that is different from that of their teachers, which might result in communication challenges for teachers and pupils' in their classroom.

It is instructive to regard diversity in classrooms as the result of the cultural heritages that learners have already internalised through a process of socialisation that occurs in families, communities and religious organisations. The power relations that develop between learners from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds are inevitably reshaped in the conditions of the classroom and school. The relationships that learners from one cultural group have with learners from other cultural groups in schools often result in the adoption of a new culture or a new identity that is negotiated among the learners concerned. The classroom is the locus, in which the cultural patterns and power relationships that accompany learners when they enter the school are renegotiated, reshaped, resisted, modified and developed (Bezemer, 2003; & Rietveld-van Wingerden, 2008)

3.2.6. Reports about classroom socialisation in international research

Research into communications and interactions in desegregated classrooms has led scholars overseas to identify the following challenges that contribute to difficulties in communication. The challenge of an assimilationist approach with regard to learners from different cultural backgrounds often challenges what learners have internalised from the socialisation that they experience in their homes, in their religious institutions and in their communities. This is especially true of those learners whose cultural, racial and ethnic identity is different from those of their teachers. Learners from the *same* cultural background as the teacher will have an advantage in terms of the following factors: frames of reference, an unawareness of colour differences, similarities in language, advantages in power relations, the expectations of teachers, the absence of communication barriers, and the instinctive understanding of the verbal and non-verbal codes that are common to both teacher and learner (Simpson & Erickson, 1983; Nieto, 2002; Jo, 2004; & Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

Some researchers are of the opinion that racial inequalities challenge and disrupt the power relations in a particular society, but that these inequalities then either confirm or reconstruct the power relations in the context of social relationships that are never neutral but always reflect the

inequalities that exist. They also describe the concept of *labelling*. This refers to the labels that teachers and other people in authority use to designate learners from disadvantaged groups (“blacks”, “Asians”, “coloureds”, and so on). When teachers claim to be colour blind, this affects the communications and interactions among themselves and between learners and teachers, because such a claim enables them to avoid any confrontation with the issues of racism (Tatum, 1997; Tate, 1997; & Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

The school curriculum can also be used as an instrument to create barriers that hinder effective communications and interactions in the schools. This happens because those in power are able to reinforce their particular point of view by means of the “hidden curriculum” or the ideological or cultural assumptions that underlie the bland face of the curriculum. The curriculum is also an effective means of suppression and domination because minority groups do not have the political power or influence to challenge the status quo that is upheld in the unfair practices of the “hidden” curriculum. This hidden face of the curriculum can be exposed by means of an analysis of the materials that are used and recommended for schools, by the cultural, racial and ethnic complexion of those who hold positions of power in the school system, and by pointing out the racial and ethnic identity of those who occupy the most lowly positions in the school (positions such as cleaners, gardeners, and so on) (Lovat & Smith, 2005).

3.3. The present position in South African schools

The discourse that is currently taking place in the South African context emphasises the fact that, regardless of the attempt by the government to desegregate and to make public schools democratic, the values of the erstwhile dominant group (the whites) are still preserved the unofficial values of many schools, although in those schools ideals of racial and cultural equality, justice and fairness in the school system are written in their policies (Soudien & Sayed, 2003b; Sekete, Shilubane, & Moila, 2001; & Naidoo, 1996) . The point being made here is that, in spite of all efforts to the contrary, communications and interactions between members of different racial, ethnic and cultural groups remain essentially the same as they were before 1994. The argument that I wish to advance is that even though the values and ideology of white South Africans remain the dominant values in the teaching process in many schools, it is possible for classroom interactions to recognise and accommodate the needs of those students who had been traditionally

marginalized through an overt and respectful acknowledgement of their cultural, linguistic and racial identities. If this can be achieved, it will result in more just and equal interactions between teachers and learners in the classroom, and that, in itself, will make the education system more equal and effective in South Africa.

3.3.1 School Migration

The new democratic government brought in a desegregated education system that resulted in the influx of black learners into former white, coloured and Indian schools. The flight of black learners out of former black schools was not followed by parallel movement of children classified coloured, white and Indian into the former black schools (Soudien & Sayed, 2003b; & Jansen, 2004; & Naidoo, 1996). Blacks' schools were under resourced, overcrowded, had poor infrastructure and the education that the learners were receiving was of inferior quality compared to the white schools. White schools were well resourced, had good infrastructure, better qualified teachers. Parents from rural and township areas who could afford to move their children to the former model C schools did so even though it implied that their children had to travel long distances by public transport from their own home in search of better education. The movement of black learners to former white, coloured, and Indian schools further reinforced the poverty of township and rural education. When black, coloured, Indian learners moved in large numbers to former white schools, they were children of the middle class and the rich parents who are economically stable. The poor community were left in their rural and township schools. In return the rich white parents also moved their children to private schools. Formerly white schools had operated within a rich resource-rich infrastructure, and were somewhat advantaged in terms of both quantity and quality of state-funded teachers, they had slightly lower learner-to-teacher ratio's, teachers with higher average qualification and a smaller proportion of under qualified teachers. Indian and coloured schools were better endowed with resources compared to black schools. African schools were generally overcrowded, badly resourced, and bureaucratically neglected (Soudien and Sayed, 2003b; Fiske & Ladd, 2004).

Chisholm and Sujee (2004:146) gave statistical analysis of overall picture in the South African provinces indicating that schools have changed in terms of the learner composition.

- In the Orange Free States, formerly white schools were composed of 66% white learners, 28% African, 4% coloured, and 1% Indian and ‘other’. These figures were however complicated by the number of unknown schools in the dataset
- In Gauteng former Transvaal Department (white) schools were 59% white, 31% African, 5% coloured, 33% Indian; House of delegates (Indian schools) were 62% African, 33% Indian and 5% coloured and 42% African.
- In the North West , formerly white schools comprised of 77% whites, 18% Africans, 4% coloured and 1% Indian learners
- In the Northern Cape, former House of Assembly (white)schools were 49% white, 34% coloured, 13% African and 1% Indian; House of representative (Coloured) schools were 89% coloured, 10%African and 1% ‘Other ‘
- In the Western Cape , former white school comprised 38% white, 41% ‘Other’, 3African and 17% coloured; former House of delegates (Indian) schools comprised 23% Indian, 21% coloured, 55% ‘Other’ and 1% African; House of Representatives (coloured) schools comprised 86% coloured, 8% ‘Other’ and 6 % African.

The observation of Chisholm and Sujee (2006) give a broader picture and understanding of diverse learners in the province of the former white schools in South Africa. The enrolment of African, coloured, and Indian learners together have changed the racial composition of formerly white schools, although these vary across and within provinces. For example, in the Northern Cape, 51% of schools are black, Gauteng 40%, in North West 23% but in the Western Cape only one fifth. Figures given above vary across and within province, often depend on population and density of schools. The open school policy in reality was determined almost entirely by class, finance, location and language. Parents who could afford the annual school fees of R2750 per child were admitted to the schools. Some schools wanted to preserve their middle-class and white identity through school fees.

3.3.2 Issues of class

Fiske and Ladd (2004) argued that there has not been flight of white children from the public schools sector since 1994. They argue that this is a result of the ability of schools to charge high fees. Schools in the inner urban areas continue to be white only or have few black enrolments.

Public schools retained white middle classes, but does not show evidence of building the new middle class of Africa learners (Chisholm & Sujee, 2006:148) alluded that the former white primary and secondary school have become schools open primarily to those parents with relatively high incomes, whether they are black, white, Indian, and coloureds. This pattern suggests that to some extent race is being replaced by economic class, as a determinant of who is able to go to the formerly white schools.

There is also debate opened by (Soudien, 2004:209) that argues that class is an important lens that learners in minority are assimilated into schools. In his argument Soudien points out “a particular kind of class settlement that is taking place at school that is being actively driven by the middle class”. In this context class formation is understood as both social and economic phenomenon, and class is understood as having both cultural and material dimensions. Education contributes to the socialisation of classes and their differential preparation for positions in the economy, politics and society.

Chisholm and Sujee (2006: 145) in their observation examining class issue realised that the class nature of former white, Indian and coloured is not homogenous. They argue that each racial category has its own way of being cut across by class. There have been and continue to be working class and unemployed whites, Indian and coloured people, and school has merged to serve them. Many of the former white, Indian, and coloured cannot be equated with middle class schooling. Many of these schools share several similar characteristics with schools in townships. The Indian and coloured schools, while better funded than those of the black townships, still did not match those of the white community. Because of the historical advantages, schools in former white communities have better facilities.

The African schools according to available reports their population has remained homogenous, i.e. predominantly Zulu in language and culture in Kwazulu Natal. Chick pointed out that they have found in their data that participants were having to negotiate their identities in the English only – discourse, ‘which came to be justified in pedagogical terms’ it rests on unexamined assumptions, originates in the political agenda of the dominant group and serves to reinforce existing relations of power (Chick, 2002:469). These assumptions include those associated with the ‘subtractive

approach' to bilingualism, namely that learning English should start as soon as possible; that the maintenance of first language is not necessary/ desirable; and that the best way to acquire English is submerge. Most indicated that code-switching is not permitted except in such non –prestigious settings as the playground, or where learners are viewed as deficient in English.

Chick (2002) and Soudien & Sayed (2003b) found that better schools in South Africa is limited to middle class, formerly white suburb followed by a few former Indian areas and to less extent former coloured areas. Schooling in South Africa is thus delineated largely in terms of class; as a result of this class and race segregation, the privileged state schools are mainly located in the middle class , predominantly white suburb, while the under resourced public schools which constitute the majority of school are largely located in the working class areas and serve predominantly black student population (Chick, 2002 & Soudien & Sayed, 2003b) in their research conclude that the available resources for the white schools far surpassed those of the black community in the townships and rural areas.

The influence of class is clear, as argued by Soudien and Sayed, (2003b: 39) that class settlement is taking place in schools that is actively driven by the middle class. The middle class are conscious of their position within South Africa, and they are constructing a new concept of integration and even a new concept of its identity around the notion of “good schooling”. This class is largely led by the new middle class that operates on the basis of buy-in of the new middle class, the new ‘elite’. For the class the priority would be to preserve the character and traditions of the ‘good’ schools for the maintenance of what they perceived to be quality. The position of the poor and their school is fixed in the sense that they are excluded from the class. The other issue that determines migrations of learners is fees at school, as discussed below.

3.3.3 School fees

When the democratic government came into power they identified basic education as a right for all citizens. They also made an explicit decision, to encourage public schools to supplement public funds with school fees. What the government did not envisage was that the fees will affect the way in which learners sort themselves amongst schools, and that fees will be a major determinant of access to formerly white schools. The school fees are determined by the school and student

governing body (SGB), and once approved, all parents are required to pay, except those who are exempted due to low income. Although a child cannot be denied admission for failure to pay the fees, schools can sue the parents for non payment (Fiske & Ladd, 2004; & Sayed & Soudien, 2003a)

Fiske and Ladd, (2004) made an empirical analysis based on two schools which provide a lens of what is happening in South African schools, the Eastern and the Western Cape. The Eastern Cape school was formed primarily from two homelands created by the apartheid government and pieces of white South Africa and has struggled with the problems of inadequate resources and a weak governmental infrastructure. The Western Cape, by contrast is a wealthy province that includes the city of Cape Town and that inherited a strong governmental structure from the apartheid era.

In the very poor Eastern Cape fees were low and nearly two thirds (63 percent) of primary school students attended schools paying fees of less than R25, 00 per year. Secondary schools fees were between R50-R100. Western Cape fees were generally high. To put fees in perspective Fiske and Ladd, (2004: 62) estimated that the average, per pupil public spending in 2001 was about R3600 for primary and R4000 for secondary schools. They conclude that schools serving richer communities both the level of fees and the collection rate are generally much higher than in school serving the poor. Hence the students who attend those schools are either middle- income students whose parents can afford the fees, or lower income students who are accepted by those schools and are eligible for a full or partial fee exempted.

By contrast, Soudien and Sayed, (2003b) argue that at secondary level, many potential students are not in schools and the drop out rate appears to have risen over time. Hence it is hard to rule out school fees as one of the factors affecting secondary schools enrolment, although other factor like school performance may play a significant role.

Vally (1999:75) claim that black learners raise issues of favouritism based on economic status. 'African' and 'coloured' learners feel they are discriminated because of their class background.

Some pupils are treated better because they have money-their families are rich

Rich kids get better treatment; they can speak in any manner towards a teacher and everything will be fine, because his parents sponsor the sports team at school.

3.3.4 Gender and Age

South Africa learners are still facing challenges of gender and age. The majority of urban white, Indian, coloureds learners' age and standard correspond, for example, grade 8 learners will be between the ages of 12 and 13. The black learners from urban area because of political unrest and rural area because of poverty tend to lag behind in age. In most cases, because of poverty, parents in rural areas preferred that male children go to school, compared to female children. Some former model c schools insisted that black pupils must be no older than the average of the class to which they were being admitted, and many imposed a maximum age gap of one or two years . This excluded many black who started school late or who missed out on substantial periods in their periods in their education through strike or political disruption (Vally & Dalamba, 1999; & Moletsane, 1999).

Sadker and Sadker, (as cited by Meier, 2005:172) argue that teachers in the former model c schools tend to interact with, call on, praise, and intellectually challenge white middle class male learners most frequently and reprimand black male learners most often.

Vally (1999:76) explain that a number of learners and principals commented on gender, sexism and sexuality discrimination as follows:

In our science, department girls are treated inferior as if they are inferior to boys. Remarks are constantly made about females being incapable of doing anything science-orientated. If you are a boy you must do technical studies.

Whites stick with whites, Indians with Indians, and blacks with blacks, but that is only with boys. Black girls, white girls and Indian girls get along very well.

A principal provided a possible explanation for the academic explanation of black females that:

Black females seem to have performed worse than others. The possible reason is that they are required to do household work which encroaches on study time.

Naledi Pandor (2004:15) in her argument for the integration of schools pointed out ‘that full integration will only be achieved, when girls are regarded in our schools as the equals of boys, when it is recognised by boys that girls have the right to realise their full educational potential’.

3.4. Current communicative approaches in the South African context

South African schools have responded to the issue of diversity in education in many different ways. Some schools have adopted an assimilationist approach and colour blindness as a way of integrating learners (Soudien, 2004; Chisholm & Sujee, 2006; & Carrim, 2002). This policy exerts a radical effect on the manner in which teachers and learners communicate in school. What follows below is a discussion of the various approaches to diversity in education that have been adopted in South African schools.

3.4.1. The assimilationist approach

The study conducted by (Vally & Dalamba, 1999) came to the conclusion that while physical desegregation permitted learners from diverse social and cultural backgrounds to gain physical access to education, the main effect of desegregation has been primarily to accommodate the values, needs and aspirations of learners from the racial group for which these schools were originally established. I agree with Carrim (2002) when he observes that current education in South Africa has, until now, been active in implementing what is essentially an assimilationist policy. Learners who are exposed to this approach are expected to adapt to the existing ethos, values and traditions of the school that has enrolled them and the curricula that have been developed for learners who are different from themselves (Meier, 2005; Harber, 1998; Jansen, 2004; & Odhav, et al., 1999). Van Heerden (1998) further argues that the process which goes under the name of “desegregation” in these schools is primarily a process of assimilation that absorbs black learners into the ethos, values and traditions of the school. This naturally ensures that the status quo is kept intact. The newcomers to these schools (i.e. the black learners) are expected to relinquish their own identities and cultures, and by implication to acknowledge (1) the

superiority of the existing culture to which they are exposed in these schools, and (2) the superiority of the group in whose social context they are being accommodated.

But wherever learners relinquish their personal identity and their cultural and ethnic traditions in favour of traditions and identities that are alien to them, they invariably develop an inferiority complex that prevents them from performing and communicating to the best of their ability (Soudien, 2003; Soudien & Sayed, 2004). The damage that such a policy therefore inflicts on the self-esteem and confidence of individual learners is inestimable (Jansen, 1999). The teachers who work within the framework of this policy simply assume that all learners who enter the school must somehow improve their own communication skills until they are able to cope with the way in which education is mediated in the classrooms. But while they make this assumption, they make no attempt to pitch their own communications and interactions at a level that will make the curriculum accessible to the newcomers (Jansen, 1999; & Odhav, et al., 1999). Thus, despite the teacher's awareness of the deficiencies that afflict black learners, there is no systematic policy that enables teachers to acquire the skills they need to teach learners of different racial and cultural groups who are at different levels of educational development – in spite of the fact that they are all accommodated in the same physical classroom. Black learners therefore struggle in their interactions with their teachers (Meier, 2005; Jansen, 1999; Odhav, et al., 1999 & Zafar, 1998).

It is possible to identify different modes of assimilation in the South African school context (Soudien, 2004 & Chisholm & Sujee, 2006). The first one is what one may call **aggressive assimilation**. This manifests in the way in which learners interact with one another in play, in the enactment and ritualisation of the formal traditions and ceremonies of the school, and, most obviously, in the pedagogical practice of teachers in the classroom. Aggressive assimilation is characterized by brusque, high-handed, abusive, intolerant, exclusionary and often violent actions and attitudes towards non-assimilated learners. The second mode is what one may call **assimilation by stealth**. When this policy is in operation, differences of race, history and culture are seldom referred to, or, if the curriculum permits it, such differences are passed over in silence. The third mode of assimilation is **benign assimilation**. This form of assimilation closely resembles multiculturalism (as it was discussed in the context of American education above)

because some attempts are made to acknowledge the cultural diversity of the school's learners in the form of cultural evenings.

Celebrating diversity through assembly programs, multicultural dinners or ethnic celebration are hollow activities if they do not confront the structural inequalities that exist at school. Simply, embracing diversity is not enough without critical examination of racial politics in our classrooms and society, as the evidence of "festival" approaches to multicultural education only strengthens white hegemony (Parameswaran, 2007:53).

The underlying purpose of various forms of assimilation policies is to ensure that the dominant power relationships between teachers and learners of different racial and language groups remain intact. Zafar (1998) claim that assimilationist approaches result in divisions between "them" and "us" within the school, and that this kind of exclusionary attitude becomes the basis for communications and interactions between teachers and learners, and among learners themselves, in all aspects of school life. Since most schools do not have forums in which learners can air their grievances and their negative feelings without attracting disapproval from the school authorities and from their teachers, these children have to learn to keep their problems strictly to themselves. This is encapsulated in the words of a learner that were captured by Dolby in 2001 in her ethnographic research:

The school is mainly for whites and sometimes you don't fit in. But they want you to fit in so you just have to be like them and do their stuff and do the stuff they want you to do. Follow them (Dolby, 2001a: 41).

This learner expresses the experience when learners are not accepted and when learners have to take personal responsibility for the factors that hinder communication in these assimilationist schools.

3.4.2 Colour blindness

Another factor that is closely associated with assimilationist policies in the context of race-based desegregation is the claim of "colour blindness". Colour blindness occurs when teachers suppress the negative emotions and images that learners from other races evoke in them by denying that such negative emotions and images exist in the first place (Moletsane, 1999; & Jansen, 2004). This

attitude of denial (whether conscious or unconscious) enables the teachers to claim that they are unaware of colour in the power relations that exist in their classrooms and in the school (Christie, 1990). Jansen (1998:103) describes the colour-blind practices that are advocated by the curriculum as

the belief that newcomers from different racial groups who have already been stigmatised as products of a background that is educationally and culturally inferior, will be instrumental in lowering the otherwise high standards that prevailed in the school prior to their arrival (Jansen, 1998: 103)

These attitudes are (mostly unconsciously) communicated to learners through the communications and interactions that occur in the classroom. Criticisms of this policy of colour blindness are based on the question that if it is indeed true that teachers are unaware of colour, then why do they not change the curriculum to suit the needs of all the learners? In another research, Jansen (1999) recommends that teachers in these former white schools should strive to avoid being “colour blind” in their interactions with learners.

The patterns of assimilation, the feelings of alienation experienced by learners, and the discriminatory attitudes of educators towards learners of other races make it difficult for learners to feel that they are accepted in a school, and this feeling of alienation causes communication barriers between teachers and learners and learners among themselves. When teachers do not acknowledge colour differences, they interact with all learners from the same frame of reference (Moletsane, 1999; Odhav, et al. 1999). Teachers should realise – that we all have different frames of references when we come from different cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds. When we communicate and interact with others, we therefore need to acknowledge the different frames of reference. This acknowledgement then becomes the basis upon which we can communicate honestly and sincerely with other people.

Research conducted by Parameswaran (2007) and Jansen (2004) has shown that many student teachers regard cultural differences as merely involving differences in practices, and that these student teachers have not been encouraged to examine the impact that such differences can make when one is attempting to communicate and interact effectively with learners from diverse

backgrounds. Teachers must be meticulous about allowing learners to express themselves in a fashion that is authentic and true to their own cultures and personal frames of reference – regardless of their status in the society. In the context of classrooms, it is usually the students of colour who complain that they are expected to articulate the minority position (in this instance referring to white learners) on issues and events because of their visible differences. It is also important for teachers to emphasise and to communicate the necessity for being tolerant of diverse opinions, customs and practices, and to educate learners to be respectful of and open to points of view that are different from anything they find in their own belief systems and traditions (Jansen, 2004).

Erasmus and Ferreira (2002) investigated the quality of interaction and the accommodation and problems experienced by black learners. Their findings suggest that racism is still a major stumbling block to good communication and accommodation in schools. It is this difference in responses to diversity that makes effective communication between teachers and learners and among learners difficult. Since the literature emphasizes the importance of the discussion of culture in communication dynamics in a diverse environment, I shall examine these concepts in the following section.

3.5 Culture and communication in South African classrooms

The literature shows that *culture* does indeed play a vital role in communication and interactions between teachers and learners, and among learners themselves, especially in desegregated classrooms. Gay (2000:79-81) writes: “*Culture* is the governing system that defines the forms, functions, and content of communication.” This implies that for every learner in a classroom who comes from a cultural background that is different from that of the teacher, there is a specific need for the teacher concerned to understand that culture because it is only through such an understanding that the teacher will be able to exert an influence on interaction and learning.

Gay (2000) writes:

The absence of shared communicative frames of reference, procedural protocols, rules of etiquette, and discourse systems makes it difficult for culturally diverse learners and teachers to genuinely understand each other and for learners to fully convey their intellectual abilities Gay (2000:79).

Terblanche and Terblanche (2004: 21) have the following to say about these problems:

It can generally be acknowledged that cultures, despite many similarities, differ with regard to styles and patterns of communication, the application of communication codes and various related aspects such as the kind of communication that they view as satisfactory (Terblanche & Terblanche, 2004: 21).

This observation makes it clear that cultural differences do indeed influence the quality of communication in the instructional context and cultural differences therefore one of the causes of ineffective learning (Terblanche & Terblanche, 2004). Meier (2005) and Odhav, et al, (1999) contends that learners who come from backgrounds that are different to that of the teacher will be invariably at a disadvantage because their integration into white schools and the culture of their schools will not have prepared white learners for the reception of black learners. We might conclude that teachers should not be blamed because they have not been specifically trained to accommodate learners from so many different cultural and ethnic groups, and they therefore do not have the pedagogical and psychological resources that will enable them to interact with these learners (Meier, 2005; & Odhav, et al, 1999).

In the research conducted by Vandeyar and Killen (2006) into teacher interaction in desegregated classroom, the researchers found that when teachers and learners came from similar cultural backgrounds, the teachers were able to imbue such learners with a sense of belonging. Such teachers constantly reinforce the positive messages that they send to learners with a similar background, and they encourage them to participate in the classroom. But, these same teachers were curt and dismissive towards learners from “other” cultural backgrounds, and they made these other learners the targets of negative feedback. The research shows that learners from other cultural and ethnic groups were also not permitted to converse in their home languages while Afrikaans learners were frequently given affirmative messages in their home language. Throughout the lesson, the teacher kept on switching between English and Afrikaans, and the use of African languages by learners was strictly forbidden in this school.

3.6 Perceptions in the learning environment

This study has undertaken to examine perceptions because the ways in which we perceive ourselves and others around us influence our interactions and our interpretations of the situations that we encounter. Wood (2002:89) defines *perception* as “as an active process of creating meaning by selecting, organizing, and interpreting people, events, situations, and activities”. Fielding (1997:101) takes this definition further when he writes: “If we perceive ourselves in a positive way, we are likely to work confidently with others. However, if we perceive ourselves in a negative way, we might perform below our actual ability.” The way in which the teacher interacts with learners in the classroom will exert a strong influence on the way they perform. If learners entertain the perception that the teacher does not like them, they will be far more likely to perform poorly compared to those learners who know that they are the “favourites” of the teacher.

Learners often attempt to excel in a subject because they do not want to disappoint a teacher for whom they have a high regard. The learners in a class in which a teacher has high expectations of their success will tend to perform far better than the learners in a classroom in which the teacher does not expect them to perform well (Meier, 2005). Sbarra and Pianta (2001), believe that a teacher’s perceptions and attitudes are determined by (among other factors) their personal experiences and professional education. On a purely personal level, the perceptions of a teacher are a product of that teacher’s individual mental and emotional makeup (such as cultural and personal beliefs, values, biases, prejudices and the assumptions that have been shaped by the teacher’s personal experiences and conditioning). Because of the way in which prejudices and assumptions are formed over a long period of time, it is more than likely that the personal prejudices and assumptions that are lodged in the mind of the teacher will be very different from those of learners who come from very different class, religious, gender and cultural backgrounds (Meier, 2005; & Sbarra & Pianta, 2001). But the ultimate result is that these quite definite differences between the backgrounds, prejudices, assumptions and preferences of the teacher and the learners will strongly affect the ways in which they communicate and interact in the classroom.

The research undertaken by Olivier et al. (2001:35) demonstrates that human beings in general and some teachers in particular are influenced by what they call the “halo effect”. This occurs when a person, having perceived one or more favourable traits in someone, also attributes various other (often unrelated) desirable traits to that person. For example, teachers who are white and who

entertain the prejudice that white learners are more intelligent than black learners, may tend to regard all white learners (as a distinct category) as more intelligent than all black learners (as a distinct category of learners). Although it is a demonstration of how the halo effect works. Fraser (1995) points out that because white learners received a more privileged education under the apartheid regime, black learners may regard themselves as “not good enough”.

Black learners therefore sometimes feel that the schools in which they have been enrolled only accepted them as a favour in spite of the fact that their background has made them somehow “unsuitable” for education in the school in which they find themselves. The kind of education that black learners received before they were allowed access to white schools was deeply inferior to that enjoyed by whites because it was deliberately designed by the ideologues of the apartheid regime to enforce racial segregation in all walks of life and to make black people *feel* that they were inferior. These precepts of “Bantu Education” informed all aspects of education at all levels in South Africa during the apartheid years, and were devised by the man who is today known as the “Architect of Apartheid”, Dr H.F. Verwoerd (Allan, 1961).

According to Olivier and Plooy-Cilliers (2001:38), and Le Roux (2001:277) this “self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when you expect other people to behave or respond towards you in a certain way, and your expectation and your own corresponding behaviour lead to the fulfilment and confirmation of your expectation [by] reinforcing it for similar future encounters”.

3.7 Teacher interaction with learners

The research conducted by Nkomo, Vandeyar, Phatlane, Tabane, Phurutse, & Malada, (2006) has challenged the above findings and assumptions. It was their observation that it is a teacher’s *personality* that is one of the main determinants of best practice in classes, and that the teacher's personality also informs not only her approach to the subject matter, but also her demeanour, her rapport with learners, and her whole understanding of what teaching is.

Nkomo, et al. (2006) observed that learners experienced learning as meaningful and exciting when the teacher took the initiative to incorporate *their* life worlds into the lesson. This approach gave learners opportunities to relate their new knowledge to their existing schemas and to accord value

to their indigenous knowledge system. It was also observed that such an approach made it easier for interactions to take place in the classroom because it offered teachers and learners a common ground from which to communicate. When learners realise that a teacher is trying to meet them half way by taking account of their indigenous knowledge and experience, they in turn try to work harder because they realise that their indigenous cultural and ethnic background and knowledge are also valuable and worthy of respect (Nkomo, et al., 2006).

Mokhele, (2006:149) argues that a positive teacher-learner relationship creates a learning environment that is conducive to learning in the classroom and that it is the main determinant of whether or not a learner is able to benefit from the teaching and learning situation. If trust and respect are absent in the relationship between teacher and learner, the teacher has “assumed a position of hegemonic dominance and ascendancy that is extremely injurious and detrimental to the self-esteem and well being of the learner concerned” (Mokhele, 2006:149).

The available literature seems to be in confirming that the acceptable relationship between a teacher and learner in the classroom should be based on mutual respect and trust. In order to achieve this, teachers have to work in close partnership with learners when decisions that affect the class as a whole are made. In order to achieve the best results in secondary education, both teachers and learners have to work as a team to achieve harmonious interactions in the classroom (Mokhele, 2006; & Nkomo, et al., 2006). Every teacher should be tireless in creating an environment in which each learner is guided towards achieving an attitude of caring and respect for other learners in the class. Mokhele (2006) discovered that teachers can improve the ways in which they relate to learners by working with learners in a collaborative manner. Collaboration implies that teachers take benign charge of specific procedures in the classroom in order to ensure that learning does indeed occur. The quality of a teacher-learner relationship is based on the quality of the communication and understanding that has been nurtured between a teacher and a learner. The extent to which a teacher is involved in the collaborative efforts of learners in a classroom will influence the quality of the interpersonal relationship that exists between the teacher and the learners. The teacher in the class is perceived by learners to be acting *in loco parentis* (in the place of the parents) (Mokhele, 2006 & Nkomo, et al., 2006)

Hennings (1994) and Sayed & Soudien (2003a) are of opinion that all children in a class should be made to feel at home without any obvious demonstrations of affirmative action that will make all the learners feel uneasy. The rules for accommodating pupils in a natural and organic way in the classroom is by acknowledging them in terms of the principles of multicultural education and not in terms of the mainstream culture on which the school was historically predicated. This will make the communicative interactions between teachers and learners much easier and more natural. The various ways in which classroom interactions are managed (in other words, the ways in which they are initiated, directed, monitored and evaluated) all contribute to the outcomes of communicative interaction. The competence to manage interactions successfully in any classroom is an essential attribute of any successful and well-trained teacher. Teachers therefore have to *learn* how to manage learning experiences in such a way that the interactions that result therefore will accommodate learners from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Hennings, 1994; & Sayed & Soudien, 2003a).

When one deals with learners from diverse backgrounds, the other issue that needs to be considered is the issue of social and cultural backgrounds and how they affect and impinge upon the communicative interaction that occurs in the classroom. When teachers plan their lessons, they ought to think about how they will accommodate the patterns of learning and the child-rearing practices within the home and family that are characteristic of different cultural and ethnic groups – especially in South Africa, where differences in child-rearing practices are sufficiently different to require particular understanding on the part of the teacher. This kind of knowledge can provide a teacher with useful information that has important implications for communication and curriculum development (Lindeque & Vandeyar, 2004)

3.8 Language policy: apartheid and post-apartheid

Under the apartheid regime, language was used as an instrument of exploitation and oppression. In the first place, distinctions were made between African languages and English and Afrikaans, and the former were not accorded the same status as English and Afrikaans. The existence of different languages was recognized, celebrated to legitimize the policy of separate development that formed the cornerstone of apartheid (Tollefson, 1991). It is ironic that the attempts by the apartheid government to impose Afrikaans as a medium of instruction upon black people

triggered the events that came to be known as the Soweto Uprising, which occurred on 16 June 1976. President F.W. de Klerk, who was president of South Africa until 1994, said in a speech that he delivered on 27 August 1999:

In sharing one's language with another, one possesses one's words, but agrees to share these words so as to enrich the lives of others. For it is when the borderline between one language and another is erased, [and] when the social barriers between the speaker of one language and another are broken, that a bridge is built, connecting what were previously two separate sites into one big space for human interaction, and, out of this, a new world emerges and a new nation is born (De Klerk, 1999).

Although the sentiments that are expressed in this speech are noteworthy and laudable, the reality of what is happening in South African schools now is quite different because South African schools do not currently recognize the need to utilise indigenous languages in the classroom setting. Some schools are about applying this rule that learners are not even allowed to speak in their mother tongue on any occasion within the boundaries of the school (McKay & Chick, 2001; & Mda, 2004)

In research conducted into teacher interactions in a desegregated classroom, the researchers found that when white teachers interacted with learners from a cultural background that was similar to their own, these teachers were so affirmative in their attitudes towards these learners that the learners acquired a sense of *belonging*. While, on the one hand, learners from other cultural and ethnic groups were not allowed to converse in their mother tongue, Afrikaans learners were continually affirmed in their mother tongue throughout the course of the lesson because the teachers kept on alternating between English and Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. Although such an action is in violation of the official language policy of the present South African government, the use of any African language was forbidden in schools. When schools deprive learners of their right to speak in their mother tongues, they not only contravene the constitutional rights of the learners concerned, but they also deny them access to their prior knowledge and their primary vehicle of cultural expression (Dawson, 2003; Soudien & Sayed, 2003b; & Lindeque & Vandeyar, 2004).

These researchers have observed that language is also the primary gateway to cognition because all the knowledge and codes that are critical to learning are embedded in a learner's home language. Forbidding learners access to the use of their home languages puts them out of touch with their foundational knowledge and cultural heritage and so hinders any further opportunities for successful learning. Such language deprivation also reinforces a message to learners that their home languages are inferior, and, because of this, they experience negation, and this diminishes even further their self-esteem and self-respect. It is extremely difficult for learners to be open about their feelings with teachers and other learners who speak a language that is different from their own (Dawson, 2003; Soudien & Sayed, 2003b; & Lindeque & Vandeyar, 2004).

Some researchers in this field (Jansen, 1998; Fraser, 1995; Carrim & Soudien, 1999) have observed that the issue of language is still a fundamentally important issue and that this debate is still wide open today. The fact that English is the medium of instruction in schools has already given white English-speaking learners a substantial advantage over black learners who do not use English as their home language. For black learners, English might well be their second or even third language. Because of this they are unlikely to be proficient in English when they arrive in white schools that use English as a medium of instruction. And because their English is less than fluent, white English-speaking teachers are likely to end up with the impression that these learners are intellectually inadequate when it is only their language proficiency in English that is poor (Meier, 2005, & Jansen, 1999; & Fraser, 1995 & Dolby 2001a). Lack of English proficiency creates obstacles, in the communicative interactions between learners and teachers.

When educationalists decreed that learners from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds should have access to all South African schools, they neglected to make adequate provision for changing the curriculum in such a way that it would accommodate these new learners, and the teachers in the schools concerned simply continued to interact with the new learners as though English or Afrikaans was their first language. Some schools carried this rule to the point where black learners were not allowed to use their indigenous language even in the school grounds. This creates the impression in learners that English is the language of privilege and power, and that their own languages are inferior (Jansen, 1999; Meier, 2005; James, Ralfe, Loren & Ngcobo, 2006).

Jansen (1999:6) made the observation that “in such schools, children learn a powerful but not always a hidden curriculum: that English has status, Zulu not”. He noted that “good teachers and role models are white, that appropriate history is European (the white heroic folks stories), and [that] failure is something that happens to the non-white children” (Jansen, 1999:6). These observations that Jansen has made about teachers in schools and the government's language policy that prevails in them, has important implications for interaction and communications in classrooms. Even though the “hidden curriculum” that is taught might be motivated by either a conscious or unconscious decision on the part of the teachers, the way in which they interact with learners create strong messages about the apparent inferiority of other cultural and racial groups and the languages that they use” (Jansen, 1999).

Many parents have enrolled their children in former white schools so that they can acquire a good grasp of English. They do this because they believe that English is the current language of international communication and a language of power and prestige throughout the world. The unfortunate result of this perception is that the learners who have entered these former white schools struggle as they try to communicate, and, they are also likely to encounter a hostile environment in which the assumption has already been made that they are “not good enough” for these schools (Jansen, 1999:6). Such assumptions damage the self-esteem and confidence of learners in a way that is inestimable. Some researchers argue that some of the teachers' previous physical encounter with blacks had been in master-servant relationships in which blacks were employed in menial roles such as gardeners or casual labourers – but certainly not as learners or potential colleagues (Meier, 2005; Jansen, 1999; & Soudien, 2004).

According to Ms Naledi Pandor, the minister of education in South Africa said in her speech delivered on the 01 May 2005:

The indigenous African languages are going to be elevated and maintain the same status as English and Afrikaans. The time has come to make the learning of an African indigenous language compulsory in all the schools (Pandor, 2005:1).

The promotion, teaching and cultivation of indigenous languages will undoubtedly improve the communicative interactions between learners and teachers, and between learners and learners, and

will enable them to get to know one another better. Lindeque & Vandeyar (2004) are convinced that learners learn best in their own indigenous language. The language issue plays a supremely important role in interactions in classrooms. What one finds in schools is that teachers reinforce the behaviour of white learners in classrooms by praising them in their home language (such as Afrikaans). But these same teachers do not reinforce the behaviour of black learners in the same way, but rather punish them for speaking their home language. This kind of behaviour reinforces the belief that English and Afrikaans are somehow “better” or more useful languages than the indigenous languages of South Africa, and that white learners are therefore superior to black learners and that that is the reason why their home languages are more acceptable than indigenous languages. Even today, indigenous languages are banned by the school authorities even though this is in defiance of the South African constitution. As one black learner remarked: “If I use my mother tongue, the teacher says that I have nothing to do with that, that I am not supposed to be here, [and that I] should attend a black school” (Vally, 1999:74). One can image how such a remark would affect a learner – especially since it emanates from a teacher. The way in which the teacher interacts with learners provides a model for the way in which all learners should treat one another because teachers enjoy the respect that is accorded to adults who are *in loco parentis* (in the position of parents) vis-à-vis the learners. Although such schools are racially integrated according to the letter of the law, segregation still prevails in such classrooms (Jansen, 1999; & Vally, 1999).

Jansen (1999) and Moletsane (1999) further observed that in some schools, black learners are actually *physically* segregated into separate classrooms because their teachers believe that their education is not up to the standard required by the school. The school authorities also assume that because these black learners are not proficient in English, they need the kind of special remedial education that can only be provided in separate classrooms. The non-verbal message that teachers send through the medium of the curriculum is that the education that black learners received in their former schools was inferior to the education that they now receive in these previously all-white ex-Model C schools. The other non-verbal message that black learners receive is that they are simply not “good enough” for their current school and that is the reason why they need remedial work.

This kind of impression is confirmed on occasions such as the annual school prize-giving when white learners walk away with all the prizes and not a single prize is awarded to any black learner. Such events reinforce the implicit impression received by black learners that they are underachievers – a perception that has already been reinforced by the separation of black and white learners into separate classrooms so that blacks can be given visible evidence of the fact that they are underachievers(Meier, 2005; & Jansen, 1999; & Jansen 2004) It was while I was discussing the communication interaction of learners from diverse backgrounds that I fully realised the significance and importance of the role of intercultural communication in this study

3.9 Intercultural communication

Successful *intercultural communication* can take place when one has learned to appreciate the uniqueness of other people and their culture, and when one has realised that one does not have to feel ashamed of one's own culture, but is rather free to appreciate and enjoy its unique features (Jandt, 2001;& Cotton, 2004). Intercultural communication relates to the interactions that occur when people are aware that they are constantly negotiating power with others by means of the use of language. Intercultural communication is reflected in the conflicts that occur between people when they use their own languages in multilingual situations and the tensions that such situations evoke (Phipps & Manuel, 2004; Garrido & Alvarez, 2006; Hybels & Weaver II, 2004). This kind of critical pedagogy of intercultural communication provides a model for those involved in the study of languages because it allows for a critical assessment of the performance of teachers from a pedagogical point of view.

Intercultural communication also requires us to be dispassionate about as they are when we examine the power relations that prevail in any situation. This pedagogical model of intercultural communication refuses to accept colonizing moves and discourse or the commodification of knowledge without challenge, and it encourages us to critically question and challenge whatever policies and assumptions may be forced upon us by those in authority. A critical pedagogy of communication allows us to adopt a critical approach to our heritage and background and also to take a critical view of intercultural communication (Phipps & Manuel, 2004; Garrido & Alvarez, 2006; Hybels & Weaver II, 2004).

Intercultural relationships in schools may cause conflicts in the classroom. An example of this has been cited by Cotton (2004) when he points out that the tensions that occur in schools that are interracial, interethnic and intercultural in nature, are a major hindrance to the improvement of learner achievement, social behaviour and social attitudes. These tensions that are cited by Cotton (2004) manifest themselves among learners and between learners and members of staff. Bennett and Salonen (2007) argue that we must offer one another opportunities to be touched by the lives of those who are different from us. They claim further that we will never be able to understand racism, social justice, international development or the situation in the life of the person who is sitting next to us unless we quietly listen to the stories of those who experience the world in ways that are different from the way in which we experience the world. This has enormous implications for classroom discourse (Bennett & Salonen, 2007).

The discipline of intercultural communication is designed to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are necessary to effect appropriate interactions across cultures. In order to communicate effectively, one should recognize one's own limitations and to study the cultural and linguistic differences between national and ethnic groups. In the end, the study of such differences should not provide us with pretexts for demonising the "other" and for pursuing policies that result in separation, negligence, prejudice and bias. The study of such differences should ideally evoke in us the capacity to demonstrate respect, sincerity, understanding and cooperation as we contemplate and appreciate the enormous differences between ourselves and other people.

3.10 Racial discourse in South Africa

The racial discourse that prevails in our society is pivotal in this research because the interactions that we as South Africans have with people who are different from us are mainly influenced by our historical background which, in South Africa, is almost always the singularly most important determining factor of the way in which we communicate with one another. The racial discourse that occurs in South Africa is different from that in other countries because of the history of apartheid and in the way in which it was implemented. This has ensured that the colour of a human being's skin and the differences between his/her culture and the cultures of others are the most important factors in any human interaction or contact (Vandeyar & Killen, 2006; & Carrim, 2002). Harber (1998) and Du Toit (1995) argues that because of the South African historical

context, the physical mingling of learners from different racial groups in one school is likely to result in racial conflict and violence unless the structure and processes of schooling are changed to accommodate these differences (Harber, 1998; & Du Toit, 1995).

Carrim (2002) and Soudien and Sayed (2003b) argue that since the government opened the gates of schools to black learners, the majority of schools have not developed any specific initiatives to ensure that the new black learners will feel more welcome in their schools. Even though the majority of teachers in these schools are still white, the schools concerned do not hire black teachers because they believe that that would lead to a decline in the standards of their schools. The belief of the standards will drop at has important implications for teachers and learners (Carrim, 2002; Soudien & Sayed, 2003b). This belief resulted in black communities placing the education of their children in the hands of more whites, who may or may not have the best intentions towards their children. There was also a concern that black teachers would not have the competencies required to teach white learners (Parker, 2008, Meier, 2005, Moletsane, 1999& Odhav, et al., 1999).

Some researchers contend that schools that are regarded as racially homogenous in fact have a majority of white teachers on the staff and a few token black teachers. This arrangement allows teachers to use their position to project covert forms of racism, to maintain the racial status quo, and to interact with African learners as “the others” (Sayed & Soudien, 2005; & Nkomo, Chisholm, & McKinney, 2004).

Nkomo et al., (2004), claims integration, in an educational sense, means changing the pedagogy and processes of a school to meet the needs of all the learners who have enrolled in that school. These researchers also refer to schools as integrative bodies that *foster* meaningful communicative interactions among learners in the classroom, on the playground and in extramural activities, apart from being institutions that promote, encourage and instil a culture of human rights. True integration and harmonious interactions can only be built on a foundation of sincere and honest communication. We cannot successfully become integrated as a society without such communication.

While this is what the present government has envisaged for South African schools, schools continue to be characterized by racial discrimination and separation. In their study, Vally and Dambala (1999) argue that if racial integration is to take root in schools, all those concerned need to acknowledge racism as the main structural feature of South African society, and to understand and appreciate the complexities of the consequences of racism in its past historical context and in its present manifestations. Racism in this context can only be linked to an analysis of power relations, and this can only be carried out on the basis of a clear understanding of class, gender and ethnic inequalities (Vally & Dambala, 1999).

Jansen (2004), in the reflections that he produced ten years after the advent of democracy in 1994, acknowledges the tension and difficulties that certain white schools experience in accommodating black students. Jansen argues that there are hundreds of incidents, both unseen and unrecorded, that younger and older students have to endure on a daily basis in South African schools simply because of their racial identity (Jansen, 2004). Racism persists and manifests itself through racial conflicts and violence in schools (Nkomo et al., 2004, Moletsane, 1999; & Odhav, et al., 1999). Most black learners who enter white or Indian schools are regarded as inferior because it is assumed that they will not be able to meet the requirements and expectations of these schools. For this reason, and also because their ability to communicate in a language other than their home language is less than perfect, they are assumed to constitute a threat to the standards of these schools.

The traditional racism of apartheid is so entrenched in some schools that separate classes are then organised for learners from different racial groups, and the school concerned then calls itself a “dual medium school” (Jansen, 1999; Moletsane, 1999 & Odhav, et al., 1999). The class in which black learners are accommodated will then be the class in which English is used as the language of instruction, and the separate class in which only white learners are accommodated will use only Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. The letter of the law is then complied with because the school can be classified as officially racially integrated even though the classrooms remain segregated (Jansen, 1999). The teachers in these schools, as already noted above, claim to regard all learners equally and not to notice or aware of the skin colour of learners. This failure to

acknowledge the colour of learners, which is a subtle form of racism, denies the individuality and diversity of the learners (Soudien & Sayed, 2003b; Jansen, 1999; & Chisholm, 2004).

Schools also promote *institutional racism* when they fail to affirm the racial diversity of their learners. Institutional racism is racism that is created and perpetuated through the power relations, traditions and institutional environment. Thus, for example, a university may outwardly appear to support non-racist ideas in their policy and actions at an institutional level even though the senate of the university may in fact privately and covertly promote and perpetuate racism in a subtle manner through the actions of its staff and in the effects of the "hidden curricula" (Jansen, 2004). It is unacceptable not to attach great importance to the identity of the portraits and paintings that are hung in the corridors of a university, to the flags that hang outside the principal or dean's office, to what staff members teach to students by means of the books and the stories they tell, to the identity of the person who makes the coffee, to the racial identity of the gardener and cleaner, and to the racial identity of the people who dominate the governing body.

All these elements are of the greatest importance because the non-verbal codes that communicate the power relations in a school are embedded in them. Institutional racism is also embedded in the sporting codes, the subtleties of the messages that are displayed on the notice boards, the jokes that the staff tell one another, the emails that are exchanged, and the racial identity of the students who always receive the achievement trophies (Jansen, 2004; Soudien & Sayed, 2003b). The discouraging feelings of alienation that are induced by means of such symbolic actions and artefacts (whether literal or not) are accurately captured by Professor Jonathan Jansen (previously dean of the University of Pretoria) when he reflects on his own experiences in this regard:

On the walls hung the imposing frames of four serious-looking white men, all Afrikaners, all former deans. I tried to look and they stare back, wondering how any student, black or white, could possibly feel welcome and at home under the glare of these serious patriarchs. I had to take them down (Jansen, 2004:2).

The unchallenged symbolism of these kinds of artefacts convey a very definite although indirect burden of communication which, even though it is a form of non-verbal communication, reminds

one of the proverbial saying, “Actions speak louder than words” and the Chinese proverb that says, “One picture is worth ten thousand words.”

Non-verbal information of this kind informs of the identity of the dominant power groups within an institution, and the manner in which they broadcast their dominance, more accurately and powerfully than “ten thousand words” could do (Zafar, 1998; Soudien & Sayed, 2003b). Jansen (2004) took Holman’s (2004) analogy of the Holocaust of over six million Jews, Poles, Russians, Gypsies and homosexuals during World War II, and translated it into the post-apartheid context in order to interrogate the hardened attitudes of black and white learners. The questions that Jansen asked were:

Why is it those white students who have no experience of compulsory military service or the horrors of policing apartheid [...], or the material and ideological conceit of white power, [...] have such powerful views on black students?

Why do black students [who were] born long after Soweto uprising of 1976 and who blossomed in the post-1990 period, have such firm views on white students? Where and how did these students, white and black, learn the discourses of struggle and the routines of domination? (Jansen, 2004:210).

Holman has designated these indirect prejudices, assumptions and attitudes as the inheritance that the white and black survivors of apartheid have consciously or unconsciously passed on to their children. Soudien and Sayed (2003b) have argued that “difference is a social construct that emerges within the contingent realities defined by ideology, economics and culture”. One may add that these contingent realities are passed from one generation to the other both consciously and subconsciously as well as verbally and non-verbally. *Teachers* and parents mediate such information to a generation that was not yet born under the all-embracing racist policies of the apartheid state. It is the experiences of teachers and learners in South African schools that inform and reinforce the racist identity that is passed on to learners in the ideological hothouses of South African schools.

3.10.1. Issues of identity

The developments that are transforming our lives both socially and culturally inside and outside our schools around the globe are influenced by the forces of globalization. The exponential expansion of globalisation in the past few decades has been fuelled by rapid changes in electronic means of communication that have effectively made the whole world into a “global village” for those who have the technology to access it. Electronic media are powerful instruments for effecting changes in our concepts of “self” and “other”, a topic that will be discussed in greater detail further on in this text. For the purposes of this study, globalisation can be defined as “the intensified and accelerated movement of people, images, ideas, technologies, and economic and cultural capital across national boundaries (Dolby, 2000). These factors influence the construction of personal identities that are no longer bound by physical borders and barriers such as inaccessibility and unavailability, and this exercises a decisive influence on personal diversity and differences among learners. Learners who play an active part in globalisation through the medium of the Internet are learning no longer to identify themselves in terms of race, but rather in terms of the latest and most influential global trends that influence their lifestyles. This has resulted in a proliferation of the innumerable ways and modes that learners utilised to interact with one another (Dolby, 2000).

Identity is, however, something that always remains open to debate in any society and that will always continue to be contested by all concerned for as long as racial, social and economic differences and inequalities persist in society (Dolby, 2000). Dolby argues that schools have responded to the exponential increase in the diversity of their learners in many different ways, and that descriptions of most schools in South Africa have been and are currently characterized by a multitude of so-called “identities”. It may be said that each school has a particular identity. Hall (as cited in Dolby, 2000:21) proposes that “identities are not formulated in isolation, but in relation to others and through the practice of representation”. He suggests that identity is a structured representation that can only be achieved through the “narrow eye of the needle” of the identity of others before it can construct itself.

Identities are always constructed in the context of dynamic conversations with others and are always focused through the lenses created by the relations of power that prevail in any institution.

Thus, for example, the dominant language in school conversations is always considered to be a language of power. Language (and therefore communication) is the building block of our identity. Castells (2000:6) reiterates this notion in his conceptualization of identity formation as an individualistic endeavour that cannot be effected in isolation but can only occur in the context of conversations that involve distinctions between the “self” and the “other” or between “us” and “the others”. Castells (2000:6) argues further that “identity is the construction of meaning” and that is composed of the meanings that social actors attribute to actions on the basis of social attributes”. For the purpose of this study, I shall abide by what the literature suggests when it describes how various elements such as language and youth identities contribute decisively to learner interactions. This observation, as well as the contribution that it makes to the discourse about the identity of learners in schools, will be discussed later in this text.

Language as an aspect of identity can be used by policy makers as a means to differentiate between different groups, but also as a mechanism for locating language within a social structure so that language determines who has access to power and economic resources. Those groups who speak the dominant language, as determined authorised by the power relations of the institution or the society in which they live, constitute an advantaged class while those who insist on speaking minority languages openly and with pride in such a situation are likely to become the victims of discrimination (Dawson, 2003; Soudien & Sayed, 2003b; & Jansen, 2004). This concentration of power and privilege in the hands of an advantaged group can fuel feelings of animosity and hatred between members of language groups. Jansen (1999) and Moletsane (1999) conducted research in an ex-model C schools that characterised themselves as having adopted what they called a “dual medium” of instruction (which turned out to be English and Afrikaans in separately constituted classrooms). In this school, black students felt strongly that they were receiving treatment that was both unfair and unequal because it was different from the treatment that was being handed out to their white counterparts. In the school, Afrikaans was still the dominant language and it was therefore given precedence over English as a medium of communication and instruction. One of the black learners in the school made the following comment:

We sort of understand Afrikaans, but someone who doesn't understand, will never hear what they are saying. We don't get much attention and we sometimes we feel excluded” (Dawson, 2003:12).

The divisions that are predicated on the basis of language in a school are taken even further and include divisions on racial identity. This inevitably leads to race-based hostility and a breakdown in communication between teachers and learners (Jansen, 1999). This can be attributed to the fact that most learners in class who use Afrikaans as a medium of instruction are white while the majority of learners in a classroom that uses English as a medium of instruction are black. Such kinds of “language arrangements” in classes confuse learners and lead them to conclude that they are being discriminated against both overtly and covertly on the basis of language (Moletsane, 1999; & Vandeyar, 2008).

Research in one of schools demonstrated that the assumption of theft was immediately made in schools in which different racial groups were mingled that when things (such as personal items, money and so on) go missing, it is the English-speaking class that usually is the first to be blamed because the “English” class is generally the class in which most blacks are located. And when the authorities invite the police to enter the premises and search individual learners, they usually search the black learners before they search the white learners (Soudien & Sayed, 2003b; & Jansen, 2004). These powerful non-verbal messages condition learners to develop very clear and exclusionary notions of “them” and “us”. When teachers hasten to accuse black students first in such situations, it merely serves to confirm the inferiority status of black learners just as much as it serves to confirm the superior status of whites. Such actions communicate to white learners and to black learners alike that the black learners do not “really” belong in the school.

Dolby also notes the extent to which the identity of young people is being influenced by the trends and processes of globalization. “Learners invested in the emotion of desire that surround consumptive practices, particularly the practices of ‘global popular culture’. Here the difference is produced, reproduced, circulated, contested and reformed as a significant construct that organizes learners’ lives” (Dolby, 2000:903) . Dawson’s study of 2003 confirms Dolby’s view that the global popular culture is used by school learners to construct, rework and coordinate their different identities and interests (Dawson, 2003). Research that has been carried out by Dolby (2001a) found that young people construct race as a discourse of taste whose coordinates reside within the parameters of a popular culture. According to Dolby (2001a, p.16), “taste” as an analytical tool of identity, provides an understanding of identity that is largely detached from “a specific and narrow

geographical place”. What she therefore refers to as” taste practices” are in reality not associated with any specific racial group, but are instead practices that actually serve to create and recreate notions and descriptions of race (Dolby, 2001a:16).

In the study conducted by Dolby (2001a), learners also interacted through a common discourse about music and fashion. They tended to categorise one another in terms of the clothes they wore and the music to which they listened. Schools would therefore allow their learners to come dressed in their home clothes (or “civilian” gear) as a method of raising school funds. The preferences of learners in terms of fashion are for labels such as (the best-known of all) Levi of San Francisco and Billabong of Australia (although there is a whole range of fashion labels that young people find acceptable to the exclusion of others). While these learners associated “All Stars” label of shoes with having a Coloured identity, on the other hand black learners would express preferences for the most expensive European fashion labels such as Giorgio Armani, Daniel Hechter, and so on. Black girls also preferred elegant silk shirts and expensive gold jewellery. In contrast to these preferences, white learners were noted for their preference for cheaper clothes, such as surf and rave-style garments and footwear.

It is the opinion of Dolby (2000) that these simple styles cannot in reality be called styles at all. But anyone who has taken the trouble to examine and interpret these fashions, will be able to observe that they reflect characteristics that are as strict, immutable and carefully regulated as the dress codes. There is also therefore some kind of power struggle between different groups in the world of fashion for learners, but because it is blacks who have for many years dictated what youth fashion is and what is not, Dolby is able to make a very strong case that identities are constructed through the eyes of others.

Music is another distinctive marker of identity among learners. Music has the power either to bring us together or divide us as a nation, although it must be admitted that the sheer volume and variety of music which young people prefer far exceeds that with which most adults are familiar. A recent and controversial example of the extent to which music either communicates a powerful group sentiment or creates division was well demonstrated by the white South African songwriter and singer, Bok van Blerk, with his unexpectedly popular song entitled “De la Rey” (2007). Most

white learners prefer techno, rave, heavy metal and various forms of rock. Coloured and African learners, on the other hand, tend to prefer “R&B” (rhythm and blues) and rap. Indians tend to prefer a range of musical styles that crosses the racial and class divides of music genres (Dolby, 2000, 2001a). The way in which learners create different identities for themselves by parading their preferences in terms of clothes and music, reflects the structures of South African society and the continuing power struggle for the means of production and influence between blacks and whites.

One teacher in the research conducted by Dolby (2001a,) described her experience of interacting with black students in a school as one of “culture shock”. This particular teacher found herself in profound disagreement with the learners for whom she was responsible on such fundamental matters as arriving in class on time, the importance of study habits, and the necessity to keep silent while others are talking. This teacher commented on these differences by explaining how hard it was for her to cope because she did not want to make the blacks in her classes feel that they couldn't “be themselves”.

The teachers interacted with the students in this school by characterising the black learners as noisy and disruptive as well as uncooperative and lazy. They therefore tended to dismiss and ridicule the black learners in racist terms. This resulted in a situation in which most of the black students were frequently unwilling to accept the authority of the school’s management or the teaching staff. The almost exclusively white staffs in this school were generally unhappy with the demographic shifts in the school and were correspondingly reluctant to teach the majority of the black learners they encountered as noted also by (Meier, 2005; Moletsane, 1999; & Dawson, 2003). The white learners in the school were there against their will because they found themselves in a situation in which the majority of learners in their school were black. The white learners in the school experienced blacks on a daily basis in interactions that were not distant, detached and infrequent but intimate and constant because they found themselves in a situation in which they had to communicate with them every day as also observed by (Meier, 2005; & Jansen, 1999). Since the original white identity of the school no longer existed, it fell to the lot of members of staff and learners who wanted to preserve the appurtenances of privilege, to recreate it. But this was a task that was already far beyond the bounds of possibility. Racial conflicts were

still the major source of conflict between the learners and the staff of the school, Dolby (2001a, & 2002).

3.10.2. White fright

The research that Dolby (2001b) carried out in a high school in Durban also examined how learners in a predominantly black school remade and resuscitated notions of whiteness, and it described the way in which these conceptions contributed to the way in which whites communicated with black students. This research identified the ways in which white learners regarded themselves as victims of racism, and the categories that they used to negate and dismiss both the historical and the existing position of their black classmates. The colour of the white pupils was regarded by these black learners as a condition of fear, powerlessness and anger. Dolby (2001b: 5) pointed out the following aspects of this discourse:” Whiteness is not [an] omnipresent and visible phenomenon, but [a] contextual site of identity that emerges and re-emerges from a continually changing set of circumstances.” The white learners in this school in fact felt “squeezed out of ‘their’ school, trapped, angry and fearful”. These white learners were responding to their new reality by making explicit what by utilising an idea that was originally expressed by Nietzsche, referred to as the “politics of resentment” (McCarthy, 1997).

The main fear of many whites is that they are no longer in control of South Africa. Many are obsessed by their realisation that alien “others” have seized the levers of power and become dominant players in the power relations and the means of production in the country. Doreen provided similar descriptions of the differences that she observed between blacks and whites, and her sense that whites were “suffering, bleeding and dying” at the hands of the blacks. These whites regarded blacks as morally inferior beings who were only interested in retaliation and revenge (Dolby, 2001b:10). The white learners in the study also communicated their sense that they had lost control of the original financial advantage that they had once enjoyed over black learners, and this compelled them to consider the disagreeable possibility that they might indeed be no longer intellectually and morally superior to blacks, as they supposed themselves to be in the mythological days of white rule (Dolby, 2001b:10).

In other research, Tatum (1997) observed the racially mixed ambience of a particular high school and realised that the black learners in the cafeteria were actually sitting side by side with white learners in apparent amity. The first and usually unspoken question in the minds of most South Africans is, “Why do black learners always sit together?” It is the principal, the teachers and the learners who are *not* at the table with them who want to know the answer to this question. Our self-perceptions are thus shaped by the messages that we receive either subliminally or overtly from the people that are around us and the ways in which they behave (Meier, 2005).

3.10.3. The new South African “equality”

Sayed and Soudien (2005) and Carrim (2002) write that the policies that have been adopted to redress the inequalities in South Africa and to deal with the divisive effects of apartheid have themselves produced new forms of division and exclusion. These policies have in fact established a whole new set of elites in South African society which apparently enjoys the “freedom” to redefine the ways in which race, class and culture operate in schools, and this new set of elites have ironically produced a whole new set of exclusions. An acronym that is used by South African society is the acronym for “Black Economic Empowerment” – (BEE). This policy offers blacks opportunities to gain equal access to the positions, opportunities and means of production that were not previously available to them under the apartheid regime. These matters are, however, not quite as black and white as the well-known black writer, Chika Onyeani, expresses in his book entitled *Capitalist Nigger* (2000). In this book, Onyeani expresses his own particular take on how a BEE realizes itself and all the opportunities offered by the black economic empowerment policy.

Onyeani examines the much vaunted ideal of equal opportunity for blacks and the BEE processes in quite a different light. In his view, BEE only empowers what he refers to as the “up and coming” black economic elite who, in his opinion, are the only ones who actually enjoy any real choice when it comes to deciding what schools their children might attend and what language is likely to become the dominant language in the power relations of the “new South Africans”. While colour is clearly not neutral, it is still a powerful determining force in the power relations that prevail eventually. It is his opinion that, regardless of whether one is white, black, Coloured or Indian in South Africa, the range of choices to which citizens have access are severely limited, and that blacks therefore still remain disadvantaged in the so-called “Education for an All Democratic

New South Africa”. These facts remain enshrined as part of the status quo in the new South Africa (Sayed & Soudien, 2005; & Carrim, 2002). The discussion above in fact has implications for communicative interactions between teachers and learners, and among learners and learners, in the classroom environment.

3.3.10.4. Equal or unequal Policy?

The South African School Act, Act 84 of 1996 (SASA), has made a significant impact on the desegregation process in schools. The purpose of this act is to provide a uniform system for the organization, governance and funding of schools, to amend and repeal certain laws relating to schools, and to provide for other related matters. The preamble to SASA as follows:

South Africa requires a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people’s talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance, contribute to the eradication of poverty and economic well-being of society, protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages, uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators, and to promote their acceptance of responsibility for the organization, governance and funding of schools in partnership with the state (The South African School Act, Act 84 of 1996).

The position adopted by the act is that schools should be vehicles to advance the democratic transformation of society (Ramaphosa, 2007; Meier, 2005; & Soudien & Sayed, 2003b).

The SASA policy left the day-to-day operation and management of all schools to the institutions themselves, while the state took responsibility for the overall monitoring and evaluation of the national framework in which education occurred. This process of decentralization is, however, not unique to South Africa, and is in fact being implemented throughout the world in countries as diverse as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (Kallaway, et. al. 1997; & Chisholm, 2004). SASA thus surrendered the day-to-day responsibility for managing schools to the parents themselves through the medium of school governing bodies (SGBs). In terms of the

definitions and formulae contained in the SASA, school governing bodies are constituted by the parents, learners, educators, representatives of the community and by members of the school's supporting staff.

The critical areas in which parents retain important decision-making powers include the levying of school fees, a development of a school language policy, an access policy, and a code of conduct for learners. They are also responsible for recommending the appointment of educators and for appointing those who are paid out of a school's fees and for maintaining the school's property. These schools funds also pay for the purchase of textbooks and for those extramural activities that the school chooses to fund. The powers of the school governing body have introduced some positive and valuable developments, and many school governing bodies perform those successfully and legitimately. But some of these school governing bodies have facilitated various discourses and practices that promote exclusion in the school by the manipulation of, for example, the standards that are set out for the guidance of teachers and learners. Because of these cleverly devised policies, some schools have been successful in excluding black parents from the governing bodies and also in blocking the appointment of black staff, allegedly in the interests of "maintaining nonnegotiable standards".

Educational policy is a powerful tool that can be used or abused by those in positions of governance. Potential for abuse by school governing bodies arises because they are left to their own devices when it comes to the interpretation of legislation. This often results in a racially distorted, biased and self-interested interpretation of the terms and intentions of the SASA. When this occurs (whether it occurs unconsciously or deliberately), the governing bodies of schools are able to implement their own interpretations and policies, even though the way in which they interpret them might be at variance with the purpose and intentions of the government, as expressed in the SASA. In this way, some school governing bodies, by using due legal processes, are able to implement hidden agendas by employing teachers whose racist attitudes coincide with their own (even though nothing of the kind is ever explicitly mentioned). It is also the responsibility of the school governing board to decide which learners will be enrolled and which will not. The extraordinary powers that the government has invested in school governing boards

obviously allow them to subvert the non-racist intentions of the SASA in many hidden and obscure ways.

A school governing board can also influence the language policy of the school and the way in which it is implemented in practice (such as in the provision of separate classrooms for learners who are being taught through the medium of Afrikaans, and the learners – who would include most black learners – will be taught through the medium of English). School boards also have the authority to determine such matters as additional school fees, the employment of extra staff, and the racial identity of staff who are employed, whether as teachers, administrators, cleaners, and so on. The effect of this power in an environment in which most of the members of the school board belong to a group, in which racist ideations are embedded, will result in predictable attitudes towards all the issues discussed above. Such distortions can be achieved in apparent complete conformity with the legal requirements that the government has entrusted to school governing bodies in South African education. Since the government has thus far refrained from exercising tighter control over the actions of school boards, the policy provisions that govern their activities and decisions remain open to subjective interpretations at every level. This allows the members of the school board to manage the business of the school with an attitude of “business as usual” without any significant changes in the embedded ethos, traditions and status quo of the school (Zafar, 1998; Sayed & Soudien, 2005; & Carrim, 2002).

Sayed & Soudien (2005) and Carrim (2002) have identified the unintended results of an inclusive educational policy in the following three areas of school life:

- governance (the ways in which schools govern and manage their activities)
- access (decisions about who can gain access to the school and in what way, and the admission policies that are implemented by the school)
- curriculum (the manner in which the school and its teachers mediate the national curriculum in relation to inclusion)

3.5. Findings from the South African perspective

The findings from a South African perspective identified the following factors as those that facilitate and contribute to communicative interaction in a desegregated classroom:

- assimilation
- colour blindness
- culture
- perception in the language of the learning environment.
- intercultural communication
- teacher interaction
- racial discourse
- issues of identity
- the phenomenon of “white fright”
- equal and unequal policies

The literature confirms that the model that is applied in South African schools is, *prima facie*, one of desegregation. In this context, *desegregation* refers to the purely physical process of bringing together learners from different cultural, racial and ethnic groups to the same classrooms for the purposes of learning and education (Vally, 1999) (with the notable exception of the so-called “dual medium” classrooms that function as a smokescreen for racial segregation, that I have already alluded to above). But the literature also establishes that hierarchy is still prevalent in all schools that were investigated. It is also noted in the literature that learners have to assent to the process of assimilation by adopting and blending into “the predominate culture of the school” (Vally, 1999).

Learners who are exposed to this policy are expected to adapt to the existing historical ethos of the school and to curricula that have been developed for different learner populations (Harber, 1998; & Meier, 2005). Hall (2005) points out that black students realise that if they want to cope and perform well under these circumstances, they need to abandon their own cultural heritage in the context of the school and attempt to create a quasi-white identity for themselves so that they fit into the school and be acceptable to the teachers and management of the school. As a result of this transformation into blacks with a semi- white cultural and linguistic identity, they find themselves in a situation in which they interact mostly with white learners in school and during their leisure hours rather than with black learners in their community who do not accept them (Sayed & Soudien, 2003a).

The “colour blind” approach that is championed by some teachers means, in effect, that although they profess to be unable to distinguish the skin colour of different learners, they nevertheless project negative racial images onto learners of other races. This inevitably affects the way in which these teachers communicate and interact with the learners. The fact that these teachers refuse to acknowledge any racial references actually results in a practice in which they tend to favour learners from the same racial background as themselves. This creates an unfair and unequal advantage for the learners who are of the same racial identity as the teachers who profess to be “colour blind”. But it clearly alienates those learners who are not from the same racial background as the teacher, and it also negatively affects the communicative interactions between teachers and learners in the classroom (Jansen, 1998; Meier, 2005; Christie, 1990; & Zafar, 1998).

The literature also emphasises the importance of perceptions in a learning environment because the way in which we perceive ourselves, whether positively or negatively and others around us influences our interactions with them and our interpretation of whatever happens in our environment. The perceptions of teachers, as of everyone else, are influenced and conditioned by all the personal experiences that they have had and the professional education that they have enjoyed. Both these factors combine to make individuals who they are, and they therefore inevitably affect the ways in which they communicate and interact with others or (in the case of teachers) with learners in the classroom and when they are engaged in extramural activities (Meier, 2005 & Dawson, 2003)

The various uses of language in education, and the advisability of the use of a particular language as a medium of instruction in schools, are still topics that are being widely debated. This debate is understandably tense because languages have been historically used as one of the primary indicators of racial identity throughout the history of South Africa. The reality is that although thirteen official languages are recognised (or fourteen, if one recognises the recent inclusion of sign language as an official language), the languages of the indigenous people of South Africa remain largely invisible in the education of secondary school learners in South Africa. Because English (or to a lesser extent, Afrikaans) is the language that is used as a medium of instruction, this gives an enormous advantage to white learners (Jansen, 1999; Meier, 2005; Soudien, 2004; & Dawson, 2003)

Some researchers have observed, English is the second, or even the third language, of black learners. This observation that black learners are not allowed to use their indigenous language in some schools sends a strong subliminal message that “English “is the language of power. This selection of English as the medium of instruction for most South African secondary schools invariable to make Zulus and speakers of other indigenous black languages feel inferior about their own home languages. This is one of the factors that make it difficult for learners to be open about their feelings with teachers, or with other learners who speak a language that is different from their own home language (James, Ralfe, Laren & Ngcobo, 2006; & Jansen, 1999). The other challenge that has been observed by researchers is that language is a gateway to cognition because it mediates knowledge and the codes that are critical to learning.

Intercultural communication has also been identified in the literature as a factor that contributes to communicative interaction between teachers and learners. It relates to the interactions that constantly occur among people as they negotiate positions of advantage for themselves in the struggle to dominate the levers of power that exist in any particular institution or situation. As people engage in this struggle for advantage and domination, they often use languages such as English to communicate with other players and stakeholders in the struggle – even though they may be less than fluent in English (Phipps & Manuel, 2004; Garrido & Alvarez, 2006). But genuine intercultural communication attempts in the use of English to facilitate interactions between teachers and learners in classrooms and to make the environment more conducive to learning for all learners.

The body of literature shows that positive and affirmative teacher-learner, learner and learner relationships have the potential to create an environment that is conducive to learning in a classroom. Wherever mutual trust and respect prevails between teachers and learners and between learners harmonious interaction can be achieved. The extent to which teachers are sympathetically and respectfully involved with their learners in a classroom will influence the quality of the interpersonal relationships that obtain between teachers and between learners (Mokhele, 2004). Within the classroom environment, the teacher is an acknowledged expert on the content that is being taught and has been entrusted with maintaining control and good order within the classroom.

Within the bounds of the classroom, it is the **voice** of the teacher and the **voices** of the learners that encompass and influence both **what** is being said and **the way** in which it is being said, and these voices serve to position speakers in relation to the framework that has been established within each classroom.

Many researchers have also observed the nature of the racial discourse in the power relations that were evident in the actions and reactions of teachers and learners in the classroom and in the other activities of the school. They have observed how powerful groups of students relegate to themselves various forms of authority and power. In most cases, the appropriation of such forms of authority has developed along racial lines, and this has served to silence disadvantaged learners. Bloome and Golden (1982), for example, have observed how a particular teacher used a white student to model the correct answer for black students in a desegregated setting. But they also observed an instance of how a teacher asked a black student to model a correct answer for the white students in their classroom. Such incidents indicate the “subtle racism” that pervades the non-verbal communications in classrooms where white students are affirmed as the possessors of superior status while the status of black student is affirmed as inferior. In these conditions, black students are taught that they should never consider themselves to be better in any way than white students (Bloome & Golden, 1982)).

The researchers whose reports have been examined in the literature have also shown that although most previously white schools are staffed primarily by white teachers, the numbers of black learners in these schools is growing dramatically. In spite of this, none of these schools has made any special provisions for accommodating the racially, culturally and ethnically different learners they have enrolled. The statistics that describe the racial identity of the staff compliments in these schools confirms that the management of these schools as well as their governing bodies are unwilling to hire black teachers in numbers that would correspond to the racial composition of the learner body. Although they appoint one or two black teachers as tokens, they are seemingly afraid that the standards of teaching in the school will decline if they were to appoint more (Meier, 2005, Dawson, 2003; & Sayed & Soudien, 2003a).

The way in which white learners regard themselves and their privileged position in schools obviously exerts a profound influence on the relationship between teachers and between learners in such schools. But in those cases where white learners regard themselves as the new victims of South African history, they use this kind of victimisation discourse to negate and dismiss the historical position and rights of black learners to a fair and equal education (Dolby, 2000, 2001). White learners who use the discourse of white victimisation as a way of understanding their position in the new democratic South Africa, regard black learners as “enemies” who are in the process of “taking over” their country, and this creates a great deal of animosity, anger and resentment among white learners (Dolby, 2000, 2001).

The literature also reveals that culture does indeed play an integral part in the communications and interactions of learners – and especially of learners in desegregated classrooms. The research reported in the literature has demonstrated that an absence of shared communicative frames of reference, procedural protocols, rules of etiquette and mutually comprehensible systems of discourse, makes it difficult for culturally diverse learners and teachers to understand and comprehend one another fully and for learners in such situations to realise their intellectual abilities (Gay, 2000)

South African education policies have contributed decisively to the quality of communicative interaction between teachers and learners and between learners in classrooms. Educational policy is a powerful tool that can be either used or abused by those in governance. The education policies in South Africa were historically used to promote the exclusion of the black learners in the name of standards, language and school fees. Since the interpretation of government education policies at the level of school management and school governing bodies has been left to the schools themselves to interpret, many schools have chosen to abuse this privilege and use the latitude granted to them by the SASA to obtain various kinds of leverage that enable them to implement their personal and community agendas rather than the spirit of democracy, fair treatment and equality that informed the passage of the SASA through parliament (Fisket & Ladd, 2004; & Sayed & Soudien, 2005).

The schools that were previously Model C schools under the apartheid regime have responded to diversity of their learners in numerous different ways. Hall (1998) believes that identity is not formulated in isolation but rather in relation to others and through the practice of representation. Hall believes that identities are constructed during the process of dynamic conversations with others and that they are mapped by means of relations of power. But the way in which each school formulates its identity decisively affects the communications and interaction between teachers and learners and between learners in the classroom. Since each school has its own identity, it tends to implement its internal policy in terms of the identity that has been established in the school and the values and political ideals to which the management of a school and its governing body pay homage.

One might say, by way of conclusion, that South African schools are still faced with an enormous variety of challenges when one considers the quality of communicative interactions that occur in many desegregated classrooms. The influence of the apartheid ideologies that underpinned the fascist and racist doctrines of separate development still pervade many previously all-white schools and the thinking and attitudes of the teachers who teach in them. This creates very real challenges and barriers for the black learners who enter such schools and who are expected to perform in them when the frames of reference are radically different for the teachers in the school and the learners with whom they are charged to communicate and interact. It is one of more regrettable facts of South African history that the desegregation of schools after the first democratic election of 1994 left both white and black learners and teachers without the resources to cope respectfully, enthusiastically and without numerous hidden fears and agendas, with the challenges of desegregation in secondary school classrooms.

3.6. Comparison of findings between the international and the South African context

3.6.1. Similarities between international and South African experiences

The trends that I detected in the literature reveal that there are certain similarities between the way in which communicative interactions are experienced in desegregated classrooms in both South Africa and in other countries of the world. The experiences that arise out of racial discourse have become a global issue. The questions of race and racism in its various forms remain at the centre

of the international debates on these topics, and it cannot be denied that they contribute directly and indirectly to the quality of interactions between people from diverse racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The prominence of the issues that surround race and racism have remained, and, it seems, will continue to be, in the words of West and Turner (2001) the problem of the twentieth century, the problem of the colour line - the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men. In countries such as Australia, the United States of America, Canada and South Africa, to name but a few, issues of race and racial inequalities continue to dominate debates on these topics. Some researchers have emphasised how questions about race become integrated into the communication and the social, political and economic foundation of the society in which they occur, and how such issues had been exploited by some as an instrument for domination and subjugation (Roos, 1995; Winant, 2000; & Soudien & Sayed, 2003b).

Even though there is a great deal of evidence that previously segregated schools throughout the world have opened their doors to learners from different racial backgrounds, they cannot claim to be truly integrated because the social inequalities that stem from racial identity are often still maintained and propagated by those in classrooms and in society at large. There is a great deal of evidence that confirms the existence of racial tensions and conflicts in the media, even in countries that are regarded as relatively enlightened. The slow process of integrating black teachers into previously white schools and the assimilation policies that attempt to “bring blacks up to the level of the whites” so that they can be integrated into the culturally dominant groups of the society in which they live, also have the effect of de-emphasising racial and cultural differences and confirming a common identity (Sekete, Shilubane & Moila, 2001; Roos, 1995; & Winant, 2000).

The body of literature contains evidence that an assimilationist approach is being practised in desegregated schools both in South Africa and in other countries throughout the world as a way of facilitating communicative interactions of a particular kind. It is the purpose of the assimilationist policy that has been discussed in great detail elsewhere in this text that those learners who constitute a minority in the international context as well as blacks, who constitute a majority in the South African context, should all be absorbed into the historically dominant cultural and linguistic group. This is achieved by requiring that those learners who enrol in schools in which a particular discourse of power relations has already been historically established, should abandon their own

cultural, linguistic and ethnic traditions and perceptions and adapt themselves to the language(s), modes of communication, the embedded values and the cultural styles of the historically hegemonic group that provided the school with its original racist and discriminatory identity. As a result of this policy, teachers interact with learners in order to indoctrinate them into accepting the dominant cultural and linguistic modes of communication that prevailed in the school before it was desegregated. It is white students whose “superiority” is constantly emphasised and affirmed in such schools at the expense of learners from any other racial or ethnic group that may enrolled in the school (Van Heerden, 1998; Meier 1998; Sayed & Soudien, 2003b; Dolby, 2002; Vandeyar, 2003; Athiemoolan, 2002; & Banks, 1987).

The inequality of students at school is communicated to them through the variations and disparities of the power relations that are observable in all aspects of school life. Schools are an environment in which power relations can be observed and used through the influence and interactions of teachers. The teacher as an authority in the classroom has the potential to confirm or reconstruct existing power relations. Social relations in the school are never neutral, and the ways in which the teachers communicate and interact with learners in the classroom reflect the power inequalities that have been established by the dominant group. The problems that arise from the enmity of the we-versus-them attitudes that are adopted by some teachers and learners have already been discussed above (De Haan & Elbers, 2005; Dolby, 2001, 2002; Soudien & Sayed, 2003b; & Chisholm, 2004).

The colour-blind approach to racial differences has also been observed in classrooms in other countries throughout the world. It has been emphasised above that when teachers are reluctant to acknowledge the importance of racial, religious, cultural and ethnic differences and fail to accord them due respect, a breakdown in communication occurs between teachers and learners and amongst learners because the teachers concerned will have no basis for recognising the differences in the frames of reference from which they and the learners operate. Colour blindness is also another way of making a learner who is different from the teacher invisible because whole areas that are extremely important in the life of the learner become obscured by the power of denial that is inherent in colour blindness (Meier, 2005, Jansen, 1999; & Sayed & Soudien, 2003a)

The function of colour blindness is to make a learner feel as though he or she *does not exist*. The sense of a “loss of self” is one of the effects that the policy of colour blindness inculcates in those individuals towards whom it is directed. The logic of this form of denial is contained in the question, how can there be any problem for these individuals because they are *identical* to the other learners in the class who do not experience any problems? It is also, as has been noted above, the proximate cause of a sense of diminished personal identity. It is also, of course, one of the smokescreens that racists utilise to disguise their hidden biases. When colour blindness is a policy that is sanctioned in a school, teachers are unable to communicate authentically and respectfully about the importance of the cultural values, norms and attitudes that underlie all forms of successful communication between individuals and particularly between teachers and learners, and learners amongst themselves (Tate, 1997; Lupi, & Tong, 2001; Jansen, 2005; Banks & Banks, 2004).

Other forms of racism may be detected in the way in which differences in the culture of learners is handled by teachers. Teacher and student interactions are influenced by the different stories in narratives that emerge from different cultural backgrounds and frames of reference that exist in a multiracial and multi-ethnic classroom. Both teachers and learners need to acknowledge that cross-cultural communication is strongly influenced by the various interpretations that can be accorded to the verbal and non-verbal behaviours that occur in the channels of interaction in a classroom. It was during the process of this research that I once more realised that what is acceptable and even laudable in one's own culture may be unacceptable or even offensive in terms of frames of reference that exists in other cultures (Gay, 2000; & Bennett & Salonen, 2007).

Bennett and Salonen (2007) have asserted that although there is no one panacea for eliminating cultural misunderstandings, everyone without exception (and this includes teachers and learners) can cultivate the skills and competence needed to communicate effectively with one another *despite* the obvious and sometimes profound differences between various cultural, racial and ethnic groups.

Both South Africa and other countries in the world have embarked on a multicultural education programme as a way that to eliminate racial and cultural differences at school. This programme of

reform is concerned with how the different backgrounds of teachers, students and staff affect their understanding and interpretation of knowledge and the way in which they communicate this knowledge and interact with one another (Banks, 1987; & Roberts, Bell & Salend, 1991). Research has shown that this strategy has not worked because it assumes that all cultures enjoy the same status in society and that all people who belong to a particular group are homogenous, which, in reality, is certainly not the case (Sekete, Shilubane & Moila, 2001). These assumptions lead people to adhere to different theories and to adopt different policies in attempts to combat inequalities. Some of the different theories that they adopt are anti-racist theory and critical race theory, to name but two.

3.6.2. Differences between research in South Africa and in other parts of the world

The first major difference between research that has been carried out in South Africa and research in other parts of the world is that researchers in South Africa and researchers in other countries have tended to use different terms to refer to diversity, and that these terms incorporate meanings that are constantly changing as a result of the immense sensitivity and possibilities of offence in the issues that are being debated.

The second major difference between research in South Africa and in other parts of the world is that, unlike the case in other countries, South African education was totally dominated and saturated by policies of segregation during the apartheid era that dictated every aspect and nuance of the lives of individuals, whether in schools or in any other sphere of activity. These policies divided people along lines of race, culture, ethnicity, class, education, economic status, and in many other ways. The power with which the segregationist laws were enforced by the apartheid regime made it difficult and even life-threatening for people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds to communicate and interact with one another.

The third major difference is that although the South African government has instituted a whole variety of policies in statutory law and other legislation that is designed to redress the inequities and discrimination that exist in education, these policies, according to Zafar (1998), exist in a vacuum. What Zafar means by this is that the government has provided no clear guidelines on the micro level for the implementation of plans or descriptions of the suggested tasks, actions and

timeframes that could act as benchmarks for those who are keen to see these policies succeed. This absence of guidelines at a local level has resulted in innumerable different interpretations of policy at every level of government and administration, whether by administrators who support the broad aims of the government or by those who oppose them. Zafar concludes her observations by pointing specifically to public discourse and an acknowledgement of government legislation at a school level in preference to a business-as-usual policy. This policy of business-as-usual is another form of denial that hinders and prevents communicative interactions between teachers and learners because the whole school system in many parts of South Africa is in a swamp of adversarial relations that continue to generate enormous degrees of animosity, resentment, fear and anger among people of all racial groups.

The fourth important major difference between research and South Africa and research overseas is that most of the teachers in South Africa who teach in former Coloured and Indian schools encounter communicative interactional barriers that emanate from homogenous and mono-cultural educational settings and traditions that characterise these schools. It has already been pointed out above that both teachers and learners lack the necessary skills, training, commitment and knowledge that will enable them to interact in a beneficial and constructive way with one another in desegregated schools. As a result of this, many teachers and learners tend to revert to the racial, cultural and ethnic stereotypes that poisoned the relationships between people from different groups' learners in the classrooms of the apartheid regime.

I draw the conclusion that South Africa, because of the way in which destructive effects of our common conditioning has been embedded in individuals and in groups, has a long way to go before we can achieve some of the triumphs that have been experienced in other countries that had been beset by similar problems and challenges. Although our policies are in place, they have been either poorly implemented or not implemented at all (in spite of the appearance of legitimacy and compliance that has been set up in many schools). If we are to bridge the enormous gap created by past inequalities and injustices, we need to take to heart the best practices that we can identify from research and practice in countries overseas and to implement the lessons that they have learned in all levels of our society – from the highest ranks of the government to the classrooms in which both teachers and learners look forward to better days. Assimilation in schools needs to be

replaced by a policy of sincere, open-hearted and true integration if we are to improve the inter-ethnic relationships among learners and teachers.

The current debates in South Africa about communicative interaction in desegregated South African schools show that the degree to which desegregation has taken place is not yet uniform across educational institutions despite post-1994 legislation and the policies that have been formulated to promote integration.

3.7. Theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

There are two “lenses” through which I intend to project the analyses that I have carried out in this study. The first “lens” is the Osgood and Schramm model of interpersonal communication which I have already discussed in chapter 2. The second “lens” consists of the various approaches to intercultural communication that I have used to investigate the viability and usefulness of the communicative interactions that occur in desegregated classrooms. I will therefore now briefly review the interpersonal models of communication that were constructed by Osgood and Schramm and discuss the various approaches to intercultural communication that I intend to use as the “lenses” in the review of the analyses that have been made in this study. I will also explain why I have chosen these two particular approaches rather than the three I might have chosen.

3.7.1. The Osgood and Schramm model of interpersonal communication.

Other models of interpersonal communication emphasise different aspects of interpersonal communication. The model that I have chosen for this study is that which was designed by Osgood and Schramm. Its primary purpose is to enable one to understand various aspects and features of communication. While the Osgood and Schramm model does not claim to explain every phenomenon in communication and thus acknowledges its own limitations, it is able to offer us an idea of how communication processes work in reality. This model emphasises the channels that one uses when one communicates and the “noise” that can disturb or obscure a channel of communication.

The other feature of this model that I found very helpful is the way in which it explains how intercultural relationships can be accommodated, and the way in which it accords importance to an

individual's personal field of experience, or how an individual's culture, experience and heredity influence his or her ability to communicate with other people (West & Turner, 2004). This has extremely important implications for the interaction between teachers and learners and between learners, as they interact from different points of view and frames of reference. Osgood and Schramm's model emphasises that the way in which individuals interact with one another and with the environment that surrounds them, influences the overall success or failure of their attempts to interact and communicate.

The diagrammatic representation that follows below illustrates how the lines of communication and interaction are connected in Osgood and Schramm's model.

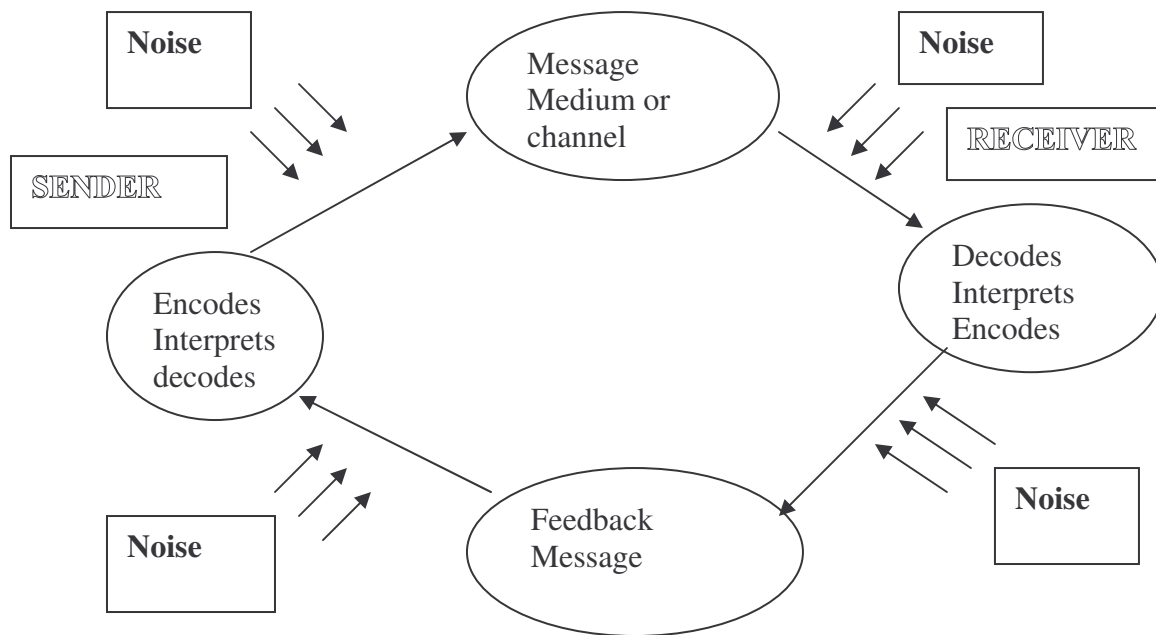


Figure 3.1. The model of interpersonal communication as set out by Osgood and Schramm (Adapted from Osgood and Schramm, 1954.)

The illustration shows how the model emphasises the various channels that one follows when one communicates, and the “noise” or interference that can disturb or block the channel of communication. The person who initiates the communication process by thinking of an idea that

he/she wants to communicate to a receiver is called **a sender**. But before a sender can send a message to the receiver, he/she needs to **encode** it. To encode a message means to make it accessible to a receiver in a code that the receiver will be able to understand. The code consists of a set of symbols which, when combined, will make the message comprehensible to the receiver. In most communication events, language is the most commonly used form in which communications are couched. The **message** is the content or subject matter that the sender wants to convey. The **medium** is the physical means by which a message is conveyed, whether it be, for example, the high frequency signals that convey a conversation to a radio or television transmission or the words of their conversation.

Decoding means the reception, understanding and interpretation of a message. If a receiver does not understand a message, it will not be shared and no communication will take place. If the receiver of the message understands the message in the way that the sender intended, the information that was sent will be shared, and the receiver will be in a position to provide feedback. **Feedback** is the response that the receiver makes once the message has been received. If a communication is garbled or distorted, it creates only “noise” that obscures the message that the sender hoped to transmit to the receiver. It is **noise** that hinders any communication process. The noise we are speaking about here distorts a sender's message. If the message is distorted at source, a receiver cannot receive and therefore interpret the message in the way that the sender intended it to be understood. Noise may be internal (in the form of a psychological impetus – such as personal prejudice – that distorts the information contained in the message). Actual external noises (such as learners playing round games in the playgrounds) may also act as noise that distracts one's attention. **Semantic noise** is a form of distraction that prevents one from understanding the actual meaning of the words. Noise causes breakdowns and interruptions of differing degrees of severity in communication processes (Cleary, et al., 2002; Erasmus-Kritzinger, Bowler, Goliath, 2000; & Gallagher, Bagin, & Moore, 2005).

Erasmus-Kritzinger, et al., (2000) argue that the way in which a teacher initiates a communication process in a classroom may create the kind of environment that is conducive to learning or the kind of environment in which noise will distort or annihilate the content of the message that the teacher is trying to send to the learners.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that communication plays a central role in the interactions between learners and teachers and amongst learners, and that the manner in which they interact can ensure either the success or failure of the communication between teachers and learners and among learners themselves. The interpersonal model created by Osgood and Schramm serves as a useful framework because it reinforces the arguments that are being presented in these pages, namely that the interactions of both teachers and learners and amongst learners are powerfully influenced by their racial identity, their culture, their genetic makeup, and by their personal and collective experiences. These experiences have the power either to reinforce or hinder their ability to communicate effectively with others in their environment.

3.7.2. Approaches to intercultural communication

The “lens” that I have used to analyse the findings of this study arise out of the theory of intercultural communication. This theory embodies the findings of three different approaches and disciplines, namely those of the social sciences, the interpretive approach, and the critical approach.

The approach of the social sciences is to describe external realities. It assumes that human behaviour is predictable and that it should be a researcher's goal to describe and predict forms of behaviour. Researchers who prefer this approach more frequently use quantitative methods of research. They set up rigorous experimental conditions and gather large quantities of numeric data by administering questionnaires or observing subjects at first hand in the experimental conditions that they have created. The weakness of this approach, from the point of view of a qualitative researcher is that quantitative research tends to rely absolutely on quantitative or numeric input despite the complexities and variables of human behaviour are not always amenable to quantification in purely numeric terms. Human communication is often creative and unpredictable, and it emanates from conditions that are not just external and therefore easily observable, but from the internal construction of meanings that have to be deduced rather than inferred (Martin & Nakanyama, 2004).

The interpretive approach assumes that while reality is external to human beings, it is more amenable to a qualitative approach because it affirms that human beings construct their own

reality. It relies on the social construction of meanings and on interpretations of what is meaningful in interactions between human beings. The researchers who rely on this approach begin from the assumption that human experiences, including communication, are subjective and that human behaviour can therefore neither be predetermined nor easily predicted. The goal of the interpretive approach is to understand and describe human behaviour in these terms. Interpretivists tend to analyse culture as a phenomenon that is created by human beings and maintained through communication. Their usual method is to attempt to understand any particular phenomenon subjectively, from positions within a specific cultural community or context (Martin & Nakayama, 2004; Hall, 2005; & Roberts, et al., 1991).

The value and advantages of this approach is that it can provide an in-depth understanding of communication patterns in communities in particular because it emphasises the investigation of communications in naturally occurring contexts. It was this expectation of being able to acquire an in-depth understanding of communication patterns in particular communities that influenced my decision to use this approach as one of the “lenses” through which I could examine the communication patterns of teachers and learners that I had gathered during the lengthy process of data collection. The main weakness of this approach is that researchers are often outsiders to the communities that they are attempting to understand. Their status as outsiders may mean that they lack the particular frames of reference that are needed to accurately describe and analyse the communication patterns of members of the community they are studying (Martin & Nakanyama, 2004; Hall, 2005; Roberts et al., 1991; & James et al., 2006).

The critical approach emphasizes the importance of studying the *context* in which communications occur. Context means the particular situations, the background and/or the environment in which the participants live and work. Researchers who use this approach believe in a subjective and eternal reality and usually focus their attention on the macro context such as the political and social structures that influence communication. These researchers are interested in identifying the power relations that are embedded in communications. From this point of view, culture is a battleground in which multiple interpretations may come together and intermingle, but in which a dominant force always prevails in the end. The main goal of this kind of research is not only to understand human behaviour but also to effect changes in the lives of everyday communicators. It

is concerned with exposing the inequalities of life. The main advantage of this approach for research is the assumption that by examining and reporting how power relations function in cultural situations, researchers can provide average people with the information and skills they need to resist the dominant forces of power and oppression (Martin & Nakayama, 2004; & Hall, 2005).

3.8. Conclusion

The particular lenses that I propose to use to analyse the data that has emerged from this study thus the interpretive approach and the critical approach because I feel that they are the most relevant to the present study. I intend to use the interpretive approach to understand and describe particular forms of human behaviour, which, in the case of the study, correspond to the behaviour of teachers and learners and among learners. I also intend to use the critical approach to examine the power relations that I have identified in the communications that were observed during the course of the study. I will also use the Osgood and Schramm interpersonal model because it is particularly suited to the study and because it provides helpful ways in which to understand precisely how communication processes function

CHAPTER 4

“Uncovering the figure under the carpet”: the multilayered context of research”

4.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and discuss the research methodology that I used for the collection and organisation of the data that was accumulated for this study.

Various definitions of methodologies can be found in the literature. According to Mouton (1996, :35), the term *research methodology* describes the research process and the kind of tools and procedures that are used to answer the research questions, to gather and analyse the data, and to solve the research problem. Van Manen, (1990:27) defines the term *methodology* as the “philosophical framework, the fundamental assumption and characteristics of a human science perspective”. The social anthropologist, Comarof (as cited in Roos, 2005:8), states that methodologies should not dictate every detail of the course of an inquiry, but should rather be responsive to “prior theoretical considerations or the questions that scholars ask”.

This study uses a *qualitative research methodology* because method supports and sustains the processes of a narrative inquiry and the case study approach. I decided to use a qualitative research design because it was my purpose to obtain as many insights as I could into the phenomena under study (communicative interaction as defined in the research description), and because I wanted to understand as much as I possibly could about communicative interaction rather than merely to test a hypothesis.

4.2. Research Strategy

4.2.1. The qualitative approach

The research method that was used in the study was, as has already been noted above, qualitative in design. Qualitative research relies on gathering as much information of a non-quantifiable and non-numeric nature as possible. Although some researchers may support the findings of their qualitative research with limited amounts of numeric or quantifiable data, the information gained

by means of such processes is purely secondary to the main qualitative design of the research procedure. Qualitative research focuses on meaning, experience and understanding and is used when a researcher needs opportunities to interact with those individuals or groups whose experiences and narratives the researcher wants to understand (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; & Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2000). Qualitative research is often carried out on a small scale because this allows a researcher to conduct a close, intimate and intense study of the experiences and conditions that require analysis, explanation and elucidation.

The most important procedures of qualitative research are the interactions that take place between the participants and the researcher because these provide much of the data upon which the researcher is able to construct an analytical, personal and interpretive account of the events, actions and narratives that emerge from the conditions that are being investigated (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; & Cohen, et al., 2000). Qualitative research enables a researcher to understand the feelings and experiences of the research participants in an intensely personal, analytical and interpretive way. Researchers therefore need to be able to demonstrate empathy for their research subjects and foster a relationship of trust between themselves and the participants in the research. A skilled researcher is able to use qualitative research to penetrate the life world and experiences of the participants in an in-depth and personal way that would not normally be accessible to casual observers. But a qualitative researcher is not merely curious about the life world of the participants. He or she is guided during the research process by the requirements of the research questions and by the structure of the explanatory model by means of which all emergent data are analysed. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) remarked that a good qualitative researcher is able to “carry” or transport the reader directly into the world of the people or events that are the subject of research.

The use of a qualitative approach in the study ensured that the data that were gathered were sufficiently rich, copious, thick and multilayered to answer the research question. During my contacts with the participants, I systematically searched for patterns, themes, consistency and exceptions to the rule because I needed these in order to identify and describe the codes and categories that were embedded in the data. These categories emerged *a posteriori* from the informants and, as is always the case with qualitative research, were not identified *a priori* by the

researcher. A qualitative researcher does not therefore impose any of her own preconceptions onto the participants, but allows data and information to merge naturally and without comment or prompting from the communicative interactions that provided the main source of data for analysis. The categories that eventually emerged from the raw data provided a great deal of rich and context-bound information that provided the basis for identifying the patterns and theories that would inform the answers to the research question(Willis, 2007; & Cohen, et. al.,2000),

Although this use of the interpretive method in a qualitative study is subjective, it is neither arbitrary, prejudicial nor undisciplined. It is indeed closely aligned with the research context and environment because it begins with individuals and sets out to understand their personal interpretations and understanding of the world that surrounds them and the things that happen to them. The qualitative method is therefore flexible, open to interpretation and dependent on the analytical skills of a researcher. Because the data arise out of particular situations, events, narratives and actions, method remains firmly grounded on the data that are collected by the researcher and is not derived from any automatic or impersonal formulae or procedures of the kind that determine the results of (say) quantitative research (Willis, 2007).

Since this research focuses on communicative interactions in desegregated South African classrooms, the research is relatively unstructured. McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 407) are of the opinion “that the validity that is claimed by qualitative research can be traced to the degree of validity inherent in the data collection techniques. Qualitative researchers therefore use a combination of strategies to enhance the validity of their results”. In the case of this study, the data that were collected for analysis were obtained by means of observation, semi-structured interviews, video recordings, field notes, structured conversations, and an interrogation of the narratives that emerged. The data that emerged from these sources enabled the researcher to understand and obtain a deep insight into the experiences of the participants, the stories they narrated, and the ways in which they related to the world around them (Cohen et al., 2000, Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999; & Punch, 2005). It is important for a qualitative researcher to be able to understand and empathise with the experiences of the participants in the events that occur in their personal and collective environment while still retaining the scientific objectivity that is

dictated by the research design and the models that she uses for interpreting the data. This is exactly what I strived to achieve with the teachers and the learners who participated in my study.

4.2.2. Clarity of the status of research in relation to the broader study

It has already been mentioned in chapter one that this study is part of a broader study.

My study was founded as I was collecting the data for the broader study on ‘*Exceptional patterns of racial integration in desegregated schools*. The broader study was conducted in two former white, conservative Afrikaans-medium high schools in the Gauteng Province, of South Africa. The schools were recognised by the department as models of integration. The schools were chosen on criteria such as prominent newspaper coverage of a former Model C Afrikaans school, which did not experience a “white flight” as black students entered their gates for the first time. The broader study was founded on the following objectives:

First, to capture exceptional patterns of racial desegregation expressed in the day to day operations of a conservative South African school. Second, to describe the various processes and phases of desegregation in the life of the school since the decision was made to grant access to black students. Third, to determine the extent to which racial desegregation was accompanied by social integration among black and white students. Fourth, to evaluate the ways in which second-order changes have accompanied the increase in black enrolments e.g. changes in curriculum, changes in staffing, and changes in the visible symbol associated with the dominant racial culture and history of the school, and lastly, to explain the trajectories of deracialization within white, working class school and what this might mean for educational policy and planning. (Vandeyar & Jansen, 2008: 1&2).

The methodology used in the broader study was the method of portraiture that was made famous in the social sciences by Harvard university’s Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot in her Landmark study *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture*. Portraiture as defined by Lawrence – Lightfoot (2002:3) “is a method of inquiry that seeks to combine systemic, empirical description with aesthetic expression by blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities rigor that is shaped by the lenses of history, anthropology, psychology and sociology” Portraiture concentrates on drawing attention to the outstanding qualities of high schools, and on emphasising whatever is

excellent in them rather than focusing exclusively on what is dysfunctional and pathological. The methodological compass of portraiture begins with the question: “What is it that is good here?” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983:10).

The team members of the broader study project comprised of: Professor S. Vandeyar and Professor J. Jansen as team leaders, Tshisikhawe Nesamvuni, Hlengiwe Sehlapelo, Heidi Esakov, Nicola Hills and Gershan Greeff. All of us assisted with data collection. The data was collected between 2005-2006. A book was published called *Diversity High, class, color, culture, and character in a South African High school* and an article entitled “Exceptional patterns of racial integration” was published by Prof. Vandeyar and Prof Jansen.

Whilst capturing data for the broader study as outlined above, my interest was drawn to the manner in which the dynamics of communication were playing out at one of these schools. As much as the broader study was looking for examples of ‘excellence’ and ‘goodness’ at this school, what caught my attention as a person with an interest in communication, was the different modes of communication and the interactions between teachers and learners, and between learners in desegregated classrooms at this school. My study thus evolved as a case study of this one school [taken from the broader study] in the Gauteng province of South Africa.

As a team member of the broader study participating in the capturing of the data, through video taping and interviews, my interest was aroused by the communication of teachers and learners, and between learners, which was not the focus of the broader study. I approached the leaders to make them aware of the interest of my study. I followed the ethical rules of the institution in conducting the research. As a point of entry for data collection I observed the video footage of the broader study of the two schools checking the viability of my study. In one of the schools I reviewed some of the positive and negative dynamics of communicative interaction between teachers and learners in desegregated classrooms, which was my main interest. I then went to the school with permission to observe the classes of the teachers that I saw in the video footage to validate the information. I collected the data for my studies in 2007 using video tapes, individual semi-structured interviews, field notes, and observational methods, with the teachers and learners who assented to participate in my study. I also opted to use the narrative inquiry approach. The

captured data was analysed by means of conventional qualitative methods: scrutiny of the text, that is the transcription of audio taped interviews and video footage, field work notes made during classroom observations, whereby emerging themes were identified. Narrative inquiry is described in detail in the section that follows below.

4.2.3 Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a particular kind of research orientation that directs attention to narratives as an instrument for analysing and elucidating texts and sequences of events, whether they are written or visual. It is concerned with finding meaning in the stories that people use and relate to others in order to explain the meaning of their lives in the events that befall them as well as the events that occur in their environment. It also focuses on whatever implicit and explicit information is embedded in the narratives and stories as they are related by individuals or by groups of people. This procedure is based on the assumption that texts can be examined separately from the tellers or the institutions in which they were scripted (Ospina & Dodge, 2005; Cresswell, 2005, & Chase, 2005). Over the past few decades, scholars have increasingly used the analysis of narratives to enhance and refine their understanding of the variety of experiences and meanings that emerged from their research contexts. Mello (2002:232) defines “*narrative* as an interactional experience that is constantly negotiated and manipulated by both the listener and the speaker”. He also points out that because the essence of narratives is ephemeral and personal, we as researchers need to find ways of negotiating the meanings and significance that are embedded in narratives by searching the stories for recurring patterns and themes in the data, by means of our own personal perceptions of the field of study, and by using our own creative insight and empathy as writers of research discourse.

Clandinin and Connelly (2005:9) claim that narratives compel a researcher to recognise the importance of acknowledging the centrality of his or her own experiences as these become explicit in reiterated livings, tellings, retellings and relivings. When it is understood in this way, it becomes clear that narrative inquiry is a method for making sense of life as it is lived.

A review of the literature reveals that narratives have essential characteristics and that they serve particular functions. According to (Mello, 2002), a narrative functions as:

- one of the main structures and supports of cognitive and perceptual processes
- a negotiated relationship and series of relationships and connections with the self, others and the environment
- a process that underlies social and cultural cohesion
- an artistic production or creation
- an educative inquiry and proximal experiences
- a representational strategy for intrapersonal and interpersonal communication systems (Mello, 2002:233)

Ospina and Dodge (2005:145) identified the following essential characteristics of narratives. First, narratives are accounts of characteristics that have a beginning, middle and an end. Second, narratives are retrospective interpretations of sequential events from a certain point of view. Third, narratives focus on human intentions and actions that include those of the narrator and others. Fourth, narratives are part of a process of constructing identity (the self in relation to others). Finally, narratives are co-authored (in the sense described above) by both the narrator and the audience (Ospina & Dodge, 2005).

Ospina and Dodge (2005) conclude their description of the kind of narratives that are used in research by noting that these characteristics make narratives suitable for understanding social events and social experiences, either from the perspective of the participants themselves or from the perspective of an analyst who is engaged in the interpretation of individual, institutional and societal narratives.

The main challenges posed by the use of narrative inquiry for research purposes are located in the organisation, analysis, discovery and elucidation of the theoretical meanings that can be derived from the data embedded in the narrative. This is a challenging and often daunting task because the nature of narratives is, like qualitative inquiry itself, both iterative and evolutionary (Mello, 2002:233). Edel (1984) claims that it is important to uncover the “figure under the carpet” that explains the multilayered context of human lives and the events that happen to people. In this case study, the researcher has utilised the stories that were told to her by the participant teachers and learners and between learner, and has examined not only the good and praiseworthy incidents in

the stories but also the negative aspects of the interactions that occurred between the teachers and learners, and between learners, as they communicated and interacted with one another in their respective classrooms.

4.2.4 Qualitative case studies

A case study offers a researcher many opportunities for obtaining detailed insight into the case that is selected for study. As Hennings, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004: 42) suggest: “Case studies require multiple methods in order to truly capture the case in some depth.” Case studies may therefore refer to processes, activities, events, programmes and single or individuals (De Vos, Strydom,; & Delpont, 2005; & Lichtman, 2006). According to Stake (cited in De Vos, et al. 2005, :272), the sole criterion for selecting events or situations for a case study should be “the opportunity to learn”. Gomm, Hammersely and Foster (2000), and Henning, et al., (2004), state that case studies should aim to be meticulously accurate in their method of describing the uniqueness of individual cases. They also emphasise that case study should not be used as a source of data for making predetermined generalizations or for extrapolating theoretical inferences of some or other kind.

Gomm, Hammersely and Foster (2000) and Henning, et al., (2004), the advantages of utilizing the case study approach are that it allows a researcher, first, to investigate people, places and situations that most of us would never have the opportunity to visit. (The present research allowed the researcher to observe and experience the unique situations and individuals that appeared within the context of the research study.) In the second place, a case study permits a researcher to set aside personal and idiosyncratic perspectives and assumptions and to observe particular situations in a new light. The guiding procedures and discipline of this research study permitted the researcher to experience a diminution of her own defensiveness and resistance to learning and she was therefore able, as a result, to place herself in the shoes of her participants, so to speak, and experience a great degree of empathy for them as they narrated their stories.

4.3. Description of the research site

The selection of the school site was influenced by the broader study. It was a multiethnic, multiracial, school in a suburb in the Gauteng province. It was a school that formerly catered

exclusively to Afrikaans-speaking white learners, but with the advent of democracy, opened its doors to different racial learners groups (Indian, coloureds and blacks) without white flight as already discussed in chapter 1. The different modes of communication and the interactions between teachers and learners, and between learners in desegregated classrooms at this school also influence the choice of the school. The school thus had a representative sample of white, black, Indian and coloured learners.

4.4. Selection of participants

The numbers of participants were 5 teachers, two white males, between the ages 45 to 50, one white female between the ages of thirty five to forty, two black females, between the ages of thirty five and forty five. One of the black ladies was non South African. The selection of teachers to act as participants was based on the patterns of interactional skills that were based on both positive and negative interaction. I had not observed them based on their subject specialization or other personal characteristics. The criteria for selection of learners to participate were based on different racial groups and on different level of standards at school. I included learners from classes that showed interactional skills both positive and negative as observed in their interaction. There were twelve learners from different classes. Grade 9 four learners between the age of twelve and thirteen, black female, Indian male, white female and coloureds male. Grade 10, four learners between ages thirteen to fifteen black male, Indian female, white male, and coloured female. Grade 11, four between the ages fifteen to eighteen, black female, white female, Indian male and coloured male. The total numbers of participants were seventeen. The reason for implementing some degree of racial diversity was to ensure representativeness. The number of teacher-learners ratio is 1: 35. The school fee was around R3, 885 per year in 2007. The video footage encompassed the following subjects, Grades 9, 10 and 11 Mathematics, Business Economics, Economics, Biology, Computer studies and Drama; English and Accounting.

4.5. Methods of Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to explore communicative interactions in desegregated South African classrooms. The study was therefore clearly limited in scope and, as one might expect of qualitative research, it made no claim to be representative of all South African high schools.

Lichtman (2006) notes that although a case study provides rich and detailed insights into a particular set of circumstances, generalizations are neither usually expected nor made.

The data for this research were gathered from video recordings, semi-structured interviews, direct observations of the interactions that took place between teachers and learners, and between learners and from field notes.

In the broader study to which this research makes a distinct contribution, the “data” that were collected consisted of extensive film footage that captured the dynamic interactions between learners and staff over a period of six months at each of the participating schools. I used selections from this film footage as one of the main sources that influenced data collection for this study. These data also therefore served as the basis for identifying other forms of data and data collection methods that would augment the vividness of the observational data obtained from the video footage. As a direct observer of classroom interactions and communications, I compiled my own research notes on a variety of sessions that were spread over a period of approximately six months. This period allowed me sufficient time to make sure that I had amassed a sufficient number of video footage, and notes from my observation of classroom interactions and the interviews that I had scheduled with the research participants.

In order to ensure the accuracy of the data, I sought (and obtained) permission from participants and made arrangements for the lessons that I observed and videotaped, and from the interviewees to audiotape interviews before I transcribed and checked for accuracy against the original soundtracks. The data that were collected from the video footage, semi-structured interviews, observation and field notes, therefore, provided me with the necessary amount of raw data for the purposes of analysis and processing. Coleman (2000) argues that the advantage of video recordings and personal observations is that they provide a “lens” through which one can observe the “lived experiences” of classroom life over a predetermined period of time. These sources provided me with a sufficient quantity of rich, textured, resonant and layered data to pursue an in-depth study of the communicative interactions in the classroom and to determine whether any coherent and recurring patterns and themes (if any) would emerge from the mass of raw and unprocessed data. One of the limitations of a case study that is performed in one school is that the

observations that have been made could be regarded as merely instructive and illustrative and not as representative of all schools of this type (Coleman, 2000).

4.5.1. Interviews

An interview in the research context is a social interaction that allows a researcher to capture the inherent complexities of subjective opinions by means of questions, requests for elaboration, and opportunities for comments from the interviewees and from the unexpected responses and attitudes that are sometimes observed in the interview format. The data that are obtained from an interview are contextual, situational and interactional (Mason, 2002). I selected a semi-structured interview format as the best obtaining the data that I needed for this study.

4.5.1.1. Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interview that is used as part of a qualitative methodology for the purpose of data collection has the ability to evoke an intersubjective and nuanced understanding of the subject of research (Cohen, et al., 2000: 267). Semi –structured interview was important for my research because the communicative interaction between the teachers and learners and between learners was analysed within an interpretive framework. Semi-structured interview allowed me and the subjects in the research to offer their own perceptions, rationalisations, interpretations and understanding of the situations that arose. Such subjective responses are crucially in qualitative research for understanding the ideological assumptions that underlie the communicative interactions that take place between teachers and learners and between learners.

The semi-structured interview schedule that I compiled consisted of a series of questions that I had designed respectively for the teachers and learners and between learners (these questions are set out in the appendix A). The subjects who consented to taking part in the interviews were personally assured that their anonymity would at no point be breached and that confidentiality would be maintained by the methods that I would implement for ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. The interviews were conducted during school hours for the learners but after school hours for the teachers. The time that was allocated for each interview varied between 30 and 60 minutes, depending upon the responses of the participants and upon my own judgment about whether a saturation point had or had not been reached – beyond which any further information

and observations would not add any new significant elements or insights. After the formal interviews, individual teachers and learners were allowed to digress, offer additional information and also make an input of information even though it did not follow the sequence of the interview schedule.

4.6. Video recordings

Of all possible observing and recording techniques, (Coleman, 2000) recommends video recording as the best method for researching doctor-patient communication because it captures all the modalities of the interaction that occur between participants in a consultation. I believe that this observation is also valid for the interactions between teachers and learners in a classroom. The schematic representation below (Figure 4.1) depicts the processes through which a researcher must proceed in order to interpret information elicited from video footage. It is a cyclic analytical process.

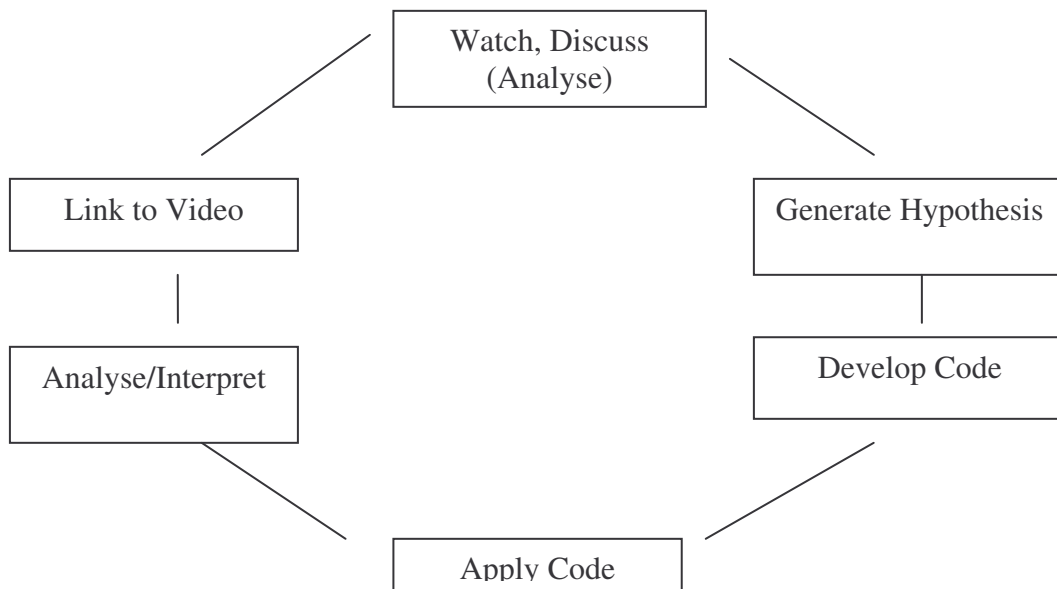


Figure 4.1: The cyclical process through which a researcher must proceed in order to analyse information collected from video footage.

I applied this emerging cycle of analysis to my research in the way described below.

I observed and analysed the recordings, and used the visual images that emerged to frame the

resultant themes and patterns that led to the identification of the codes and categories that accounted most accurately for the overall meaning of the data. After observation and analysing the recordings had been completed, I developed a coding system with which to check the validity of the recurrent patterns and themes. The coding system I used required repeated views of the video recordings. It was from these repeated viewings that I developed the objective codes that would enable independent coders to draw the same conclusions and judgments as I had done from the video footage (Jacobs, Kawanaka, & Stiger, 1999).

The use of video recordings for the collection of data has a number of distinct advantages. First, video data are arguably more “raw” than other forms of data, and the situations first observed on video can easily be confirmed by observations of the actual context in real time. Second, video recordings can capture both lesson content and classroom events, as well as other important visual information (such as what ever is written on the blackboard) and the verbal content of exchanges. Third, because video recordings can be stopped, fast-forwarded and rewound, they are amenable to being viewed any number of times for the purposes of critique, review and critical discussion. Fourth, video data are more versatile than other forms of data because they can be reviewed by different researchers from many diverse backgrounds and disciplines, bringing fresh points of view to the analysis of data. Fifth, observers from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds can (depending on their particular orientations and interests) review all the facets of the data including gestures, behavioural and speech patterns, as was the case with my study. Finally, video recordings enable a researcher to watch the same selection of events repeatedly so that I would have opportunities either to confirm or challenge the various dimensions and interpretations of all the relevant manifestations of verbal and physical behaviour on the tape (Jacobs et al., 1999; & Coleman, 2000).

But video recordings may also be disadvantageous because they can affect the internal validity of the study. One of the axioms of social sciences research is that participants who are being observed may alter their behaviour to some lesser or larger extent. The exact extent to which they are being influenced by the observational set-up cannot, however, be easily determined (Coleman, 2000).

Despite this disadvantage, video recordings have many other advantages, the chief of which is that they provide structured opportunities for conducting the cyclical analytical processes by means of which the significance of the data may be determined. In the case of my study, the video-recordings were used as a field for gathering basic forms of data that could later be processed and then either confirmed or disconfirmed by means of other modes of data collection for my study.

4.7 Data Gathering and Analysis

During the data collection process, I began by considering and assessing the information that I had collected from my overall study of the video footage. I observed a variety of particular lessons from the video recordings that were between thirty minutes and an hour long. The subjects taught in the classes captured on the video footage encompassed the following subjects, Grades 9, 10 and 11 Mathematics, Business Economics, Economics, Biology, Computer studies and Drama; English and Accounting. As was mentioned above, my choice of subjects was determined by the teacher's interactional skills both positively and negatively and not by the subject specialization that he or she taught. It was the way in which the teachers stood out from their colleagues in their interactions both negatively and positively with their learners in the video footage of the broader study that influenced my decision of choice of participants.

I then conducted pre-interviews with the teachers and learners to establish whether I had correctly identified the people whom I had selected according to what I had seen on the video footage (as observed in the broader study) prior to attending their classrooms for observation. The pre interview was conducted after I had scrutinized the interactions of teachers and learners video footage of the broader study. After approaching and receiving permission from the leaders of the broader research project I approached the teachers as seen in the video. Some of the teachers I had observed in the video footage declined to participate in my study. But five of the teachers voluntarily agreed to participate in my study. My purpose in observing interactions in real time in the classroom was to validate what I had observed on the video footage and to determine whether any habitual and recurrent patterns would emerge. I observed six lessons of each teacher I had selected from the broader study, before taking further video footage and interviewing the teachers and learners as a way of validating what I have seen from the broader study. I then began observations and video taping the teachers' lessons, conducted individual semi-structured

interviews, and took field notes as a way of data collection for my study. After interviews, individual teachers and learners were allowed to digress, offer additional information and also make an input of information even though it did not follow the sequence of the interview schedule.

The data analysis utilised in this study is consistent with the claim made by Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004:127) “the analysis of data as consisting of an ongoing, emergent and reiterative approach rather than a purely linear or rigidly sequential process”. In analysing the data, I utilised conventional qualitative methods: scrutiny of the text, that is the transcription of audio taped interviews and video footage, field work notes made during classroom observations, whereby emerging themes were identified.

4.8 The trustworthiness and credibility of the study

The trustworthiness of a study can be described as the highest degree of neutrality that a researcher is able to attain with regard to the varying degrees of bias and subjectivity that may exist in findings or recommendations (Babbie, 2001:276). I therefore utilised some of the strategies that increase and affirm the trustworthiness and credibility of a study. I took various measures to ensure that the research had been undertaken as thoroughly and honestly as possible. The broadest perspective possible was obtained through the variety that was observable in the participants and through the video recordings. Participants were in the study given various opportunities to review and comment on the transcripts of the interview, and some of them did that, thus getting opportunities to ensure that their comments had been reported and presented correctly and accurately.

Since I was the primary instrument for collecting and controlling the data in this study, it is conceivable that some of the data might have been unconsciously filtered through my particular theoretical positions and biases in a way I might have been unaware of (Merriam, 2002). But because I had readily acknowledged my own subjectivity as a researcher, I recognized that “it is unwise to think that the threats to validity and reliability (credibility and trustworthiness) can ever be erased completely. Rather, the effect of these threats can be attenuated by attention to validity and reliability throughout a piece of research” (Cohen, et al., 2000:105).

By way of summary, this study was deemed to be valid on the basis of the following: First, an acceptable (convenience) sampling had been used. Second, I had applied *triangulation* (or more than one method) to arrive at my final conclusions. Third, I had undertaken a thorough review of the relevant literature in order to discover the points of view from which other researchers had proceeded. Fourth, all the interviews and video recordings that I had undertaken with teachers and learners and learners and learners had been duly transcribed and checked for accuracy. And, finally, all the participating teachers and learners had volunteered to take part in the study freely and without duress.

4.9 Ethical considerations

It is important to understand the ethical issues and concerns which studies should be addressed such as this one for the protection of the interests of the learners concerned. First of all, it is essential when conducting research to obtain informed consent forms from each of the participants. This means that all participants will have to be informed about the purpose of the research, the methods of data collection, the ways in which the findings would be made public, the issues of anonymity and confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the research at any stage without explanation and without incurring any kind of penalty (Silverman, 2004; Cohen et al., 2004).

I adhered meticulously to the university's protocol that governs this kind of research and been duly observed. I therefore drew up a letter of informed consent in consultation with my supervisor and the authorities of the school involved. All these letters were presented to the parents and/or legal guardians of the learners (if they were less than 18 years of age). All the consent forms were signed voluntarily in the presence of an impartial witness. All these measures were taken in order to ensure that each of the learners was given an opportunity either to participate in the research or to decline participation. The letter of consent that was drawn up also described the process of the research. The participants were also kept informed of the progress of the research process as it occurred (Merrigan & Huston, 2004; Cohen et al., 2000).

All the research participants were selected on a voluntary basis. The real names of the participants were never used in any situation. This meant that their personal identities would be fully protected

from any kind of undue scrutiny whatsoever. The identity of the school was also not revealed in any context whatsoever, and any identifying evidence of the school was excised from all the records.

Finally, I subjected my research project to the scrutiny of the Ethics Committee of the faculty of the University of Pretoria in which I am registered as a student.

CHAPTER 5

THE JOURNEY

5.1. Introduction

In chapter 4 I reviewed the methodology and provided a description of the methods, data techniques and strategies that I used to gather data. In this chapter, I discuss the findings of the empirical investigation that I undertook into the communicative interactions in desegregated South African classrooms. I captured the data embedded in these interactions by means of video recordings, semi-structured interviews, observations, and field notes. An analysis was projected through the “lens” of an interpretive approach to the findings. The findings that emerged have been presented as the central themes of my case studies. My discussion of individual responses includes some quotations from the interview data and references to relevant points of view in the literature that I examined in order to substantiate and offer support for the assertions that I have made. Emergent themes from the data were recorded and categorised and are reflected in the sub-headings of this chapter.

As has already mentioned in the previous chapter, as a point of entry for data collection I observed the video footage of the broader study of the two schools checking the viability of my study. In one of the schools I reviewed some of the positive and negative dynamics of communicative interaction between teachers and learners and between learners in desegregated classrooms, which was my main interest. I then went to the school with permission to observe the classes of the teachers that I saw in the video footage to validate the information. I collected the data of my own study, using video tapes, individual semi-structured interviews, field notes, and observational methods, with the teachers and learners and learners and learners who assented to participate in my study. As a way of analysing data, I utilised conventional qualitative methods: scrutiny of the text, that is the transcription of audio taped interviews and video footage, field notes made during classroom observations, whereby emerging themes were identified.

I used the following pseudonyms to identify the teachers that I had observed in their respective classrooms. *Jeannie, Lesedi, Acha, Johan* and *Hein*. The numbers of participants were 5 teachers, two white males, between the ages forty five and fifty, one white female between the ages of thirty five to forty, two black females, between the ages of thirty five and forty five. One of the black

ladies was a non South African. There were twelve learners from different classes. Grade 9 four learners between the ages of twelve and thirteen, a black female, Indian male, white female and coloured male. Grade 10, four learners between ages thirteen to fifteen black male, Indian female, white male, coloured female. Grade 11, four learners between the ages fifteen to eighteen, black female, white female, Indian male coloured male. The total number of participants was seventeen. The video footage encompassed the following subjects, Grades 9, 10 and 11 Mathematics, Business Economics, Economics, Biology, Computer studies and Drama; English and Accounting.

The majority of the learners are from middle class homes, although there are few learners from orphanage nearby. Those learners from orphanage schools fees are paid by the management of the schools. The majority of the black and coloured learners are from the surrounding townships. Indian and white learners are from nearby suburbs. The school fee is about R3, 885 per year.

The literature review in chapters 2 and 3 introduced a set of categories that will serve as a framework for the categories by means of which I present my findings. The following categories were identified from the data: *racial discourse, colour blindness, assimilation, language as a means of communication and interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication, teaching style, cultural differences, teachers' interaction with the learners, interaction amongst learners, and, lastly, class participation in desegregated classrooms.*

5.2. Racial discourse

The body of research shows that our interactions as South Africans are influenced by the conditioning of our historical background, and that this influences the way in which we communicate with one another. One finds evidence everywhere in schools of the legacy of race policies from the past and the baneful effects of racism, with its concern for homogeneity, its characteristic power relations, its institutionalisation of oppression and its injustices, and this affects the way in which teachers and learners communicate and interact with one another. (Jansen, 1998, Moletsane, 1999; & Meier, 2005) point out that the majority of former white schools have a racial composition of mainly white teachers with a sprinkling of token black teachers. This was also the case with the school in which I conducted my research. What happens in these schools is that all the black, Indian and coloured learners who enter the school are consciously or unconsciously influenced by their fellow white learners to assimilate themselves

into the prevailing white culture rather than to value and construct their identities and meanings in terms of their own cultures (Odhav, et al., 1999; & Meier, 2005)

The findings from this research provide ample evidence that both the teachers and white learners in the school practice various forms of racism and that this, in turn, affects their communicative interactions in the classroom. The results of the research provide evidence for the existence of the following kinds of racism in the school: *individual racism*, *institutional racism* and *subtle racism*. Most of the white teachers and learners refuse to acknowledge the presence and effects of racism in their school. In the sections that follow, I will describe and discuss each of these forms of racism in turn.

5.2.1. Individual racism

This is the kind of racism that learners and teachers experience directly in contact with individual people. Some teachers practise individual racism in their contacts with black learners. One of the participant teachers (Jeannie) in the study expressed herself in the following words about the possibility that individual South Africans might be able to disregard and renounce the practice of individual racism in favour of non-racist and non-discriminatory attitudes and communicative interactions:

I do not think that black and white kids will ever be able to integrate hundred percent. I believe that there will always be racial issues amongst the blacks, coloureds, Indians and whites.

The views of this teacher do not give us much reason to hope that learners from desegregated schools will ever be able to coexist without practising racism in their communications and interactions. Since teachers are in a position of authority and influence in a classroom, and they function (consciously or unconsciously) as role models for their learners, it would seem that their held beliefs and attitudes affect the way in which they relate to learners (Nkomo, et al., 2006). Under such circumstances, most learners will endorse the beliefs, convictions and attitudes of their teacher and this will be a powerful motivating factor for the continuation of racist attitudes in the school. One can imagine the alienation learners feel that must pervade their school lives and activities, because of teachers and learners that are from different racial group from them.

Teacher (Hein) who participated in the study expresses his opinions:

[Because] black and Indian learners came to our school, they have to adapt to our way of doing things. It is their responsibility to learn Afrikaans and English. They should have come to the school with competency in both languages, [and] the learners must see how they cope at the school. It is not my responsibility to teach them these languages.

The learners in the research sample concluded that both these two teachers (mentioned above) were racists. Teacher Hein uttered those words above maybe because of the fear of interacting with learners from diverse background. As mentioned by (Odhav, et al., 1999; & Meier, 2005) that the government had not negotiated with the teachers to accept learners from diverse schools in their classrooms. One teacher (Acha) made the observation that coloured learners thought that they were better than her because she was a foreigner. She claimed that they therefore intimidated and threatened her in the classroom. She was also of the view that the learners undermined her and looked down upon her as a teacher because she was black. This teacher made the following remarks:

We are from a different radius races. Sometimes it's difficult for me to handle them. I don't know how to handle them. They just do their own thing, especially the coloured pupils. They are all over the class and [they] treat me like a foreigner.

Another teacher (Jeannie) also experienced varying degrees of intimidation at the hands of the coloured learners. She claimed that they confronted her and called her names. This teacher added that she also suffered disrespect at the hands of the black learners:

They disrespect me because they say it's their culture. Because in their culture a woman is nothing, there is nothing that I can tell them or learn from me as a woman.

Some of the black and coloured learners strongly expressed the view that there were teachers who were racists because they shouted and directed most of their anger at the black and coloured learners as they interact with them in the classroom. They therefore concluded that these teachers hated the learners. They also claimed that black learners were blamed for anything that went wrong at the school as shown in Dolby's research (Dolby, 2001a). Some of the teachers even

verbally expressed their hatred for the learners and made it clear by their words and actions that the white learners were their favourites. The teachers also called the black learners names when they were angry. One of the learners expressed this in the following words:

The teacher does not normally like to be interrupted. If you do so, he gets irritated and gets very negative, and he ends up calling us names like “stupid”, “domkop”.

The Indian learners in the sample agreed that they were not accorded the same treatment as the white learners. One Indian learner described this unequal treatment in the following words:

Some teachers talk to learners, but it depends to whom they are speaking too. It depends on the colour of their skin. They shout a lot at black and coloured learners [so] that even other learners from other races notice it. But they speak nicely to us Indians and white learners.

Black learner expressed the same opinion about the racism of some of their teachers in the school, and provided many examples of how it works:

To other teachers apartheid might be over, but [it is] still alive in their own minds. Teachers hate us for no apparent reason. We are confused [but] do not understand why. Is it not because of the colour of our skin? Other teachers even voice [the opinion] that they do not like black kids. The teachers also have a tendency to speak and give individual attention to white kids rather than to other races and [they] tell the rest of the class that they are their favourites because they do their work. They [the white learners] are praised a lot, but the teachers also verbalise that they are not OK with the black kids because they are lazy.

There were also two white learners who believed that reverse racism was being practised in the school:

I do not enjoy group work because black learners discriminate against me [and] because they discuss [things] in their mother tongue. And I feel left out because I do not understand what they are saying. I feel stupid and excluded. That’s why I prefer to work alone.

A white learner articulated what Dolby (2001) has already found from her research, namely, that white learners regard themselves as victims even while they negate and dismiss both the historical

and existing position of their black classmates. They regard their whiteness as a space in which fear, powerlessness and anger emerge.

One teacher (Jeannie) who espoused a particularly view of black learners made the following remarks:

There are children who came from townships, who either think, “Oh well, somebody is going to give me something because I am entitled to it.” Or they think they do not want to stay in such an environment [and think] “I do not owe them anything; they must just work hard, and perform.” In reality, there will always be learners who you do not like and those you like, and one cannot always find something to say that is good about everybody.

The way in which teachers interact with learners in a classroom is obviously influenced by their personal beliefs. Teachers who feel learners are imposing on their personal space in interactions will end up blaming the learners for everything that goes wrong in the classroom at all times (Soudien & Sayed, 2003b). There are learners who practise individual racism in the classroom. They prefer to bully other learners in the classroom, as one black learner puts it:

There are white learners who bully us in the classroom by picking a fight with us, and tell us that we do not belong to the school, we must go back where we come from (meaning the black school)

We clearly have a long way to go as South Africans before racism is uprooted. Even though racism might be officially abolished in our policies, such policies are not effective unless individual teachers and learners acknowledge that they do have problems with racism and that they are willing to make the effort required to change. It might also be the fear that they had been in a monologue environment that both teachers and learners do not know how to interact with learners from diverse group, as observed by (Meier, 2005; & Sayed & Soudien, 2003a).

5.2.2. Institutional racism

The findings reveal that two of the teachers in the school Lesedi and Acha, admitted that the learners in the school were not treated equally by either the administration or by some teachers. They revealed that the dominant group in the school (the whites) still receive preferential treatment in comparison to other learners, and that the school still uses what they call “dual-

language teaching” (which means English and Afrikaans as the languages of instruction) that white and coloured learners are still favoured over learners of other races. The use of English and Afrikaans gives white English- and Afrikaans-speaking learners an advantage in their communication and interaction over other learners because they share the same linguistic frame of reference as the (white) teachers who use these languages to communicate and interact with learners.

The teacher, “Hein,” was very frank in describing his personal feelings and frustrations:

Personally, I feel [that] black learners, when they were admitted to our school, were forced upon us. And a different culture – that’s chaos. I personally did not mind the black, but it is very difficult to teach them because they do not know what they are supposed to know for their grades. There is that gap from primary or previous schools compared to our standards. I do not know where the gap comes from but learners are not at the same level with whites [and] so it’s so difficult to teach them. But I do not have a problem with different racial and cultural groups.

Teachers who persist in practising institutional and personal racism in schools will always stick to the ways of doing things that prevailed in the school before black learners entered their gates. The attitudes of these teachers will always cause barriers in communication because everything will be done according to the ways of the white-dominated culture without taking any cognisance of the different needs of learners from other races, cultures and ethnic backgrounds. The notion that African learners come with a “gap” in their experience of schooling and that they have received an education that is inferior to that of white learners, validates the belief of some teachers that Black schools are inherently inferior and that the education that the white learners receive makes them better learners than black learners (Jansen, 1999; Soudien & Sayed, 2003b & Moletsane, 1999)

In the video footage of a poetry evening that was organised at the school, the manner in which white learners were affirmed in their position of dominance in the school was clearly revealed. In the first place, the dominant position of white learners was substantiated by the fact that the majority of learners who attended the event were white learners. Since it is also the white learners who organised the poetry evening, only a few blacks and coloured learners attended. Not a single Indian learner attended the function. The white teachers who were present to support the learners also participated in the proceedings. While two coloured learners “rapped” their poems, the

remaining poems were read by white learners. Why did learners from other racial groups not participate? This is but one example of institutional racism because the white learners were commissioned by the school authorities to organise and take on the required leadership roles.

Jansen (2004) argues that the identity of those who are in leadership positions does indeed matter because the occupancy of leadership positions sends a subtle message that those learners who are of the same racial identity as the leaders in a school are superior to those who are of a racial identity that is different from that of the leaders. The school in which the study took place is composed of white, black, coloured and Indian learners. The fact that the school fails to involve Indians and black learners in a variety of extramural activities and events, demonstrates their beliefs that these learners are not capable of making a valuable contribution to events such as the poetry evening. It also demonstrates their lack of confidence in these learners. It is inevitable in such circumstances that the learners who were from other race groups would feel that they do not truly belong to the school. Institutional racism is constantly reinforced by means of such non-verbal messages as exclusion from important or entertaining events such as the poetry evening. The inferior status of black learners is also loudly and clearly emphasised by such non-verbal messages, and they are made to understand that they should never consider themselves to be superior or equal to white learners (Sayed & Soudien, 2003a). In the video footage of the poetry evening the learners of mixed race in their interaction were sitting on the floor very comfortable with one another. They were sharing the blankets and food. There were no racial tensions amongst themselves; they seem to be enjoying each others' company.

Jansen (1999) contends that, in most cases, a general assumption is made that African learners do not meet the requirements of the school's expectations. They are generally regarded as being unable to communicate and are regarded as a threat to the standards of the school. One of the teachers (Hein) who participated in this case study verbalised these sentiments in the following words:

It's difficult to teach black learners because they do not know what they are supposed to know in their grades [and] there is that gap from primary or previous school. [These] learners are not at the same level as the white learners.

Teacher Jeannie reiterated these same sentiments:

As for most black learners, nobody expects the children to make something out of nothing. The teacher does not expect the learners to come with knowledge and skills because of the background that they are coming from. My interpretation is that they were going to end up being criminals. Very few will better themselves in life.

Such low expectations and negative characterisations of learners reinforce the predominant power relations that already exist in the school, and can cause learners to believe that they cannot perform at a level that exceeds their teachers' expectations. These expectations and characterisations will be reflected and reinforced by the way that certain teachers interact with learners and convey the message that they are inferior. This confirms with Meier (2005) and Soudien & Sayed (2003b).

The research also found that the beliefs of teachers are communicated to learners in subtle, non-verbal and subliminal ways, and that this influences the communication and interactions that occur in the classroom (Sayed & Soudien, 2003a). Teachers were observed to send affirming messages to white learners that they were superior to black learners and that black learners were less favoured because they were "not good enough". Such actions have dramatical consequences for black learners' learning and communication because the actions create barriers that hinder communication (Sayed & Soudien, 2003a)

The teachers Lesedi and Acha made the observation that learners resorted to forming cliques according to their racial identity. The manner in which learners participated in the classroom also revealed and reinforced the power relations in the classroom. They noted that members of whatever racial group that is dominant on a particular day would speak more frequently than members of other racial groups. One of these teachers remarked: "It's as if they are giving each other a chance to dominate the class, they never participate equally in the classroom."

Black and Indian learners also observed racism in action in the way they were treated in the sports arena (Jansen, 1999). It is noteworthy that the school had hired coaches for rugby, cricket, and hockey but none for soccer, which is the game in which the majority of black learners are interested. Since no coach was hired for them, they simply had to make do between themselves. This omission on the part of the school also sent a non-verbal message to learners that the only

important games were those that were preferred by the majority of learners. The subtext of this is that “they” are more important and worthy than “us”.

There is a particular incident in the video footage in which I observed the racial composition of a group of learners who were selected to visit the university for some special occasion. It was quite noticeable that only the cleverer learners had been chosen to go, and the fact that all the members of the group were white, this sent a powerful but subtle non-verbal message that any learner who was not white was simply not good enough to be considered for selection. As an observer I could see the disappointment in the faces of black, coloureds, and Indian learners. This kind of behaviour on the part of teachers affects the attitudes of the learners towards them, and determines the quality of the interactions and relationships that learners are able to have with them. It also creates a negative attitude in learners from racial groups other than the dominant white one, and it serves to reinforce the communication barriers that already exist. It also generates much “noise” (in the sense discussed earlier in this text) that will prevent any good messages that have been sent by teachers from reaching learners, and from learners reaching each other across racial lines.

The majority of black, coloured and Indian learners in their interaction agreed with the statement that they had relationships with learners from racial groups other than their own, although most of the learners admitted that they had to change their behaviour when they were enrolled in the school in order to fit in with the predominantly white ethos and traditions of the school. Some learners observed that some of the white learners were very rude and insulting to them, and that they treated them with an “attitude” because of the colour of their skin. As a result of this, the learners of colour kept away from them and refused to interact with them. One of the white learners rationalised this behaviour in the following way:

They [white learners] behave that way, not because they are racists but because of the way they have been brought up by their parents. They have been told not to associate with blacks because they are inferior to them.

This kind of information from learners made us realise that the racism that was practised by these learners might not have originated spontaneously in the learners themselves, but that it might have been instilled into these children by the racist attitudes of their own parents (Muhammad, 2005).

Jansen also questioned the racist attitude of learners born after apartheid was abolished. (Jansen, 2004)

Another noteworthy finding with regard to racism that we detected in the data was that learners were not dividing themselves into cliques in terms of race alone, but also in terms of the particular ethnic groups to which they belonged. The Zulus thus thought that they were better than the Sothos or the Ndebeles, and so on (with many variations based on ethnicity). The divisions that were apparent in the class among blacks were also made in terms of ethnicity. We found that the Sothos would separate themselves physically from the Zulus, and so on. Divisions based on power relations were also observable in the various black ethnic groups, and which group was able to position themselves more advantageously than the others was a matter of supreme importance to the black learners in the study.

5.2.3. Denial of racism

The findings of Schultz, Buck and Niesz (2000) confirms with the findings that I identified in the literature when they noted that when people find themselves in multiracial contexts overseas, they refuse to discuss any aspect of race or racism for fear of offending other people. Because of this fear, people avoid the subject of race, and a tacit agreement between teachers and learners to remain silent on any aspect of the topic of race that might stimulate conflict or disagreement, is avoided. We noticed this kind of avoidance in some of the teachers and learners in the school when they denied that racism existed in the school and labelled any manifestation of racism as a “personal problem” on the part of a particular learner or teacher who had publicly demonstrated racist attitudes and behaviour. One teacher, Jeannie, stated that “the problem at the school is definitely not colour”, and added that “the problem is personal [and] not racial [because], in my opinion, the learners are [all] friends”.

Another teacher, Johan, made the following remark: “I have not yet seen any racial conflict around the school premises or heard of it. It seems like learners of different races have adapted well to the school.” Other white learners claimed that teachers interacted with learners of all racial groups in the same way in the classroom. One of them made the following observation on this matter:

But the way they teach them affects the learners differently depending on the learners' personality [and] because of the difference in their culture and behaviour. That's why there is misunderstanding between learners and teachers from different cultures. It is not racism.”

Since there is evidence in the findings to show that many of the teachers and learners refuse to acknowledge that the colour of their skin is an important difference, one might conclude that this form of subtle denialist racism is widely practised. The denial on the part of both teachers and learners that any racism existed in the school led me to conclude that they were unable to deal with the root causes of their racism and misunderstandings, and that they had to call it by a different name (such as a “personal problem”) in order to cope with it. The learners observed in their interactions they are all the same, they treated each other with respect, and they do not judge one another. As one learner says, “we are true friends, even though we do not visit one another at home, but at school we are friends”

But racism was in fact being practised on all the different levels of school life: by teachers or learners on an individual level, and by the school itself on institutional and group level through the propagation of colour blindness, denial of racism, and a discourse of reverse racism or white victimisation.

5.3 Colour blindness

Many teachers and learners claimed that they were completely unaware of colour as an indicator of personal racial identity. On the basis of this claim, they asserted that all learners “are the same”. colour blindness occurs when teachers and learners suppress the negative images that they hold of learners of other races by professing not to see colour at all (Zafar, 1998; & Jansen, 1999). Three of the teachers (Jeannie, Lesedi, and Hein) in the sample agreed that all the learners were “the same”, that there were no differences at all between learners except for the colour of their skin – of which they claimed to be unaware. The effect of this is that teachers, who do not acknowledge any racial differences, will interact with all learners from the same frame of reference.

We did not make any changes in our behaviour when learners from different races entered our gates. There was no need. Children are children, and people are people. All learners are the same. Whether they are blue, yellow and

green or purple, we treat them all the same. To us, they are one person; the difference is in the colour of their skin.

But we have noted above that when teachers and learners operate from a position of colour blindness, authentic communication is hindered and there is compromise because people from different racial backgrounds use different frames of references when they communicate. It is only when teachers and learners take the racial differences of others into account, that they will become aware that they need to make a special effort to accommodate and understand one another.

All of the teachers claimed that they were oblivious of colour, one teacher, Jeannie expressed it this way:

When dealing with learners, I do not really see colour. Children are all the same. I could not care less whether the learners are black, white yellow or pink, as long as they make the grades.

A number of the learners also advocated a colour-blind approach, and the majority of them agreed that they got along with one another without seeing “the colour of the skin of their classmates”, who, they claimed, “are all the same”. It is for this reason that I believe that interracial friendships and learners’ interaction with one another remain on a superficial level and do not flourish outside the school gates. One learner described the superficiality of these interracial relationships as follows:

I have friends from different racial groups that I am close to on a superficial face. We understand each other but we do not visit one another at home. It ends at school.

The doctrine of colour blindness as a method of coping with differences is prominent not only in South Africa but also in other countries such as the United States, where issues of race are always in the forefront of people's minds. Research undertaken by Tate (1997), for example, shows that both African-American as well as white teachers whose school system also subscribed to the personal position of “colour blindness” because, in their view, it helped them to impart the middle class values and modes of behaviour that are valued by most Americans to those classes of Americans (such as blacks and Hispanics) who are devalued by the official ideology of the state. But even there, those teachers and learners who did not acknowledge their differences found that their colour blindness ensured that in transracial relationships would remain superficial because

they prevented them from exploring their differences, learning from one another, and ultimately appreciating and valuing their differences. Interactions between teachers and learners can never be neutral. One teacher, Jeannie in my study, pointed out that “there will always be issues between black, white, Indian and coloured learners” because of the underlying power dynamics at play. She also believed that “there will never be true integration of learners at school”, and that only a policy of assimilation would enable the school to accommodate learners from diverse backgrounds. The learners’ interactions especially the girls from all races are more accommodative of one another compared to boys. The girls pointed out that in their interaction with one another they do not see the colour of each others’ skin but if they have differences in opinions they always solve their problems amongst themselves. The boys admit that they are friends, and work together in the classroom but it depends, as they are friends with individual learners from their ethnic group first before they are friends with learners from other races, for example, the Zulu black learners are friends with Zulu’s first before they are friends with coloureds . If they had differences in opinion amongst themselves, they tend to have fist fights to solve their problems, which sometimes end up as a racial issue, but in fact it is only a difference in opinions.

An Indian learner expresses the cause of their differences and put it this way:

We are all the same, whether black, white, Indian or coloured, it does not matter the colour of our skin, that’s were the difference end. We are all human beings and we are friends. We do have differences in opinions but we sort it out amongst ourselves, without involving the teachers.

5.4. The assimilation of learners

There is a great deal of evidence in the literature to show that more schools in South Africa and abroad are utilising an assimilationist approach in order to accommodate learners from different racial backgrounds. But this assimilationist policy requires that all members of the minority group (which, in the school I was studying, was black) surrender their personal identity and become absorbed into the dominant group (which, in this case, was white) through an intentional adoption of the language, values and cultural modes of the dominant group (Athiemoolan, 2002, Shealey, Lue, Brookes & McCray, 2005; & Parker 2008).

Findings from research undertaken in Canada show that all immigrants were expected to absorb the beliefs, cultural assumptions and value systems of the dominant white group. This policy was underpinned by the assumption that it is better to be white and to abandon one's own indigenous ethnic and cultural identity because it is no longer good enough (Tatum, 1997; & Roediger, 2001). After schools were desegregated by the legislation enacted by the South African government, some schools attempted to cope with the influx of black, coloured and Indian learners by adopting an assimilationist model (Soudien & Sayed, 2003b; & Lemon, 2004). All learners who are not white were therefore expected to adapt as quickly as possible to the values and languages of the ex-Model C schools where only English or Afrikaans were used as media of instruction. Even after the passage of the SASA through parliament and the propagation of the ideal of non-racialism in schools, the curriculum that had been developed exclusively for the use of white learners under the apartheid resumed was not subjected to any kind of change or alteration (Odhav, et al., 1999; Van Heerden, 1998; & Jansen, 2004). In other words, the educationalists who were responsible for the curriculum did not make any change that would enable ordinary teachers to accommodate the great variety of cultural, historical and linguistic differences of learners who did not belong to the white group.

Carrim (2002) and Van Heerden (1998) respectively note that assimilation meant that only black learners were expected to make radical reductions to their culture and their language-use patterns so that they could be absorbed into their new schools and so that the historical and cultural status quo of previously all-white schools could be kept intact. Other research findings carried out in Afrikaans- and English-medium schools show that there were some early attempts to institute communicative interactions between teachers and learners of different races. But no white school ever effected any major changes that would enable black learners to integrate into the school and to feel more at home in their new situation. As we have noted before, it was up to African learners only to adapt their behaviour so that they would be able to fit into the customary modes of interactions in these schools and learn to adopt new ways of speaking to teachers, paying attention in class, obeying the rules, studying hard, and adopting new attitudes towards school work – attitudes that were different from what they had known in their former African schools (Odhav, et al., 1999; Van Heerden, 1998; Meier, 2005; & Sayed & Soudien, 2004). The message that was

strongly projected to black learners was that they would have to adapt themselves to Afrikaans culture and Afrikaans as a medium of instruction (Van Heerden, 1998).

I found evidence from teachers and learners in the study that an assimilationist policy was being consciously implemented in the school. Three of the teachers (Hein, Jeannie, and Johan) agreed that an assimilationist policy was absolutely necessary to achieve desirable educational outcomes in the long run. One of these teachers specifically confirms this by saying: “When black learners come to our school, they have to adapt their behaviour to that of the school.”

Teacher Jeannie made the following comment: “I cannot really explain why black learners cannot understand white culture.” She related the following incident that had occurred on one of their sports grounds:

Black learners refused to sing traditional Afrikaans songs. They sang their own African songs with participation from white learners. The white learners in turn refused to sing African songs.

This teacher could not understand why black learners did not want to fit in with the practices and traditions of white learners even though these same white learners were making an effort to meet black learners half way. This teacher remarked: “black children [are] not prepared to fit in with white learners culturally.”

What this teacher had not realised is that power dynamics were at play in all these situations, and that the black learners were refusing to be dominated by the white learners. While the teacher concerned was promoting (whether consciously or unconsciously) the subtle indoctrination of black learners so that they would ultimately allow themselves to be acculturated into the dominant white culture, she did not realise that she wanted them to accept the status quo of the school as it had always been. She wanted black learners to accept the fact that white learners had been there before them, and she wanted them not to interrogate or critique the dominance of white culture in the school, but rather to accept it – even though they found it difficult to agree with some of the things that were being done at the school.

As one black learner explain:

We are learners, we refuse to sing Afrikaans songs because white learners wanted us to sing their song, we are tired of being like them, and we just want them (white) learners to accept us for who we are...

The above issue emphasises the findings of Soudien and Sayed (2003b) regarding the way in which teachers in their study treated the learners: they expected the black learners to adjust to the dominant ethos and traditions of the school without any corresponding effort on the part of white teachers and learners to accommodate the new arrivals and to make them feel more at home in what is essentially an alien cultural environment.

Teacher Johan made the following observation: “The black kids do their own things their own way. They are not forced to be at school.”

Many learners also succumbed to some extent to the assimilationist approach when they interacted with one another. The majority of black, coloured and Indian learners admitted that they had changed their behaviour in some ways in order to fit in the school. One learner remarked: “I had to change my personality to be like them for fear of rejection from learners and teachers.” Another learner noted: “You either [have to] defeat them or join them. In the end, the majority of the learners had to join them in order to survive at school.” Many black and Indian learners realised how to cope in the situation, and was articulated by a learner as follows:

When we joined the school, we had to learn Afrikaans or we would fail because both learners and teachers used Afrikaans as the dominant language in class [and it was a language that] we did not understand.

This learner’s sentiments were shared by two of the black teachers (Lesedi and Acha) who also felt that they did not fit in because they did not speak the dominant language of the school (which was Afrikaans). One teacher (Acha) summed it up by saying:

It was also a transition for me that everybody speaks Afrikaans, and I was so frustrated to the extent that sometimes I wondered what I was doing at the school. I felt I did not belong and did not fit in the school.

The experiences of both the learners and teachers from different racial backgrounds were similar: they felt that they did not fit in at the school because they were made to feel like unwelcome outsiders. White teachers and learners used a language (in this case, Afrikaans) to dominate and humiliated them and others. For them, the necessity to survive dictated that they either adapt or leave the school.

Language can also be used as a vehicle for assimilating learners in the school because the majority of the learners who were already in the school spoke only their own language (which was, in this case, Afrikaans). Once again it is noticeable that it was the *minority* learners who were the ones required to adapt and cope or fail. This places difficulty in the way of meaningful communication and interaction because as long as learners cannot communicate in or understand the dominant language of instruction and communication, they are likely to fail in their academic studies and be rejected by the learners of other racial groups who occupy a position of dominance in the school.

The evidence that proved the existence of an assimilation policy in the school is reflected in the view on the part of all the black, coloured and Indian participant learners that they had to change and adapt their behaviour in many different ways in order to fit in with the school for fear of suffering the consequences of exclusion and rejection from many different people. One learner remarked:

I had to change my personality to be like them because I realised that it is [the case that] either you join them or be defeated by them. But at heart I am still the same person. I just needed to change to survive.

The white learners, by comparison, all agreed that they did not have to adapt their behaviour to fit into the school. One of the white learners said:

For us it was a smooth transition from our previous school. Everybody accepted us the way we are. We did not have to change anything. We fitted very well into the school.

The white learners did not encounter any problem in their process of adjustment to the school because they were continually affirmed by their teachers as learners who belonged to the school (compared to those “others” who had invaded their territory). And so those learners who had come to the school from different racial backgrounds felt compelled to change their behaviour in order to fit in with the traditions, customs and ethos of the school and to be accepted by other learners and teachers.

5.5. Language as a way of communication and interaction

The language that is used in a desegregated classroom can either be a sensitive and excellent vehicle of communication or else it can be used to create barriers to communication in the interactions when it is used between teachers and learners and among learners themselves. Research conducted by Nieto (2002) provided evidence that teachers and learners have been conditioned to think of language as an element that creates difficulties if classrooms are populated by diverse learners rather than as an instrument for introducing empathy, respect and efficiency into teaching and interactive communications. Since the majority of people in the school were able to speak the language of power (namely English), a stigma attached to speaking any language other than English, and this stigma was all the more and exclusionary if the language that a learner spoke was one of the black indigenous languages of South Africa (Nongogo, 2007; & McKinney, 2007; & Dawson, 2003). This “English-only” attitude communicates disempowering messages to all concerned. Speaking indigenous languages of South Africa seems to be associated with a lack of prestige and limited choices, especially for those who cannot speak English well. This underlying assumption exerts a negative effect on the interactions that take place between teachers and learners and among learners themselves. This takes place because it is easy for white learners to misjudge and underestimate the capacity and skills of learners from other races who appear to be incompetent in their performance when, in actual fact, their command of English (or Afrikaans) is simply not up to the standard of a speaker who has grown up with either of the languages as a home language.

In the present case study, the majority of the teachers in the sample used two languages, namely English and Afrikaans, as media of instruction and communicative interactions. There are frequent examples in the video footage that show how some of the teachers switched from English to

Afrikaans because they were more comfortable in Afrikaans and more competent to use it because it were their home language. Unfortunately, however, this had an effect on those disadvantaged learners who did not understand Afrikaans in that it prevented them from understanding what was being said and from communicating with other people in the classroom. One of the learners in the sample expressed the sentiments of the majority of black, coloured, and Indian learners when she said:

I never used to speak Afrikaans when I came to the school. But in this school, I have realised it is a must that you must know it because the majority of the teachers speak to you or teach in Afrikaans. [If therefore you do not understand Afrikaans], you will fail or you will not fit into the school.

The research conducted by Nieto (2002) that has been mentioned above, has important implications for my argument about the state of communication between teachers and learners in a classroom setting. It is evident that learners, whose language and culture are openly valued, receive affirming messages about their personal worth, capacity and abilities. But the opposite is also unfortunately true: learners whose language and culture are not obviously valued, will feel that they are unworthy of being in the school because they themselves are somehow not as valuable and equipped to benefit from education as the other learners in the school.

Language under the apartheid regime was used in South Africa as an instrument of exploitation, alienation, control and oppression. The language that was used as a medium of instruction in the school during the apartheid era depended on whether the school was English- or Afrikaans-medium. The new language policy that was introduced in by the post-1994 government was based on the recognition that all languages share the same status, value and worth. But the reality in the school that we studied was that English was the medium of instruction, even though the majority of learners in the school were Africans, for whom English was not their home language. Research conducted by Vandeyar and Killen (2006) points out that when learners have been brought up with the same home language as their teachers, they are made to feel that they belong to the school and to its traditions because they enjoy a similar frame of reference.

In some schools in South Africa, the use of African languages in the classroom (and even sometimes on the school grounds) is specifically forbidden by the school authorities (Dawson,

2003). The dominance of English and Afrikaans in the school we were investigating was confirmed that teachers who kept switching from English to Afrikaans and vice versa in order to convey information and also as a way of affirming white learners in their mother tongue. This ban on the use of the eleven indigenous languages clearly constitutes a violation of the provisions of the South African Constitution which guarantees and affirms the equal value, worth and importance of all the official languages of South Africa. The other more practical disadvantage is that when African and other learners are forbidden to speak in their mother tongue, they are deprived of the opportunity to access their prior knowledge in the construction of personal meanings and interpretations – a process that is fundamental to good education (Lindeque & Vandeyar, 2004).

There is also evidence in the video footage that clearly shows how two of the teachers (Jeannie and Lesedi) in the school encouraged learners to conduct discussions in their mother tongue. These teachers were apparently not bothered by the fact that they did not understand what the learners were saying, and they continued to encourage them to converse in their home languages because they realised that this enabled them to participate more effectively and comfortably in the classroom. Their classrooms were livelier and noisier than other classes. The learners mostly interact with their ethnic groups but it looked like all learners were comfortable with the arrangement. But some of the teachers I interviewed reacted rather differently from these two teachers in the video footage. In the interviews that I conducted, three of the teachers (Hein, Acha and Johan) in the sample complained that when learners conversed in their mother tongue in the classroom, they felt uncomfortable because they did not understand what the learners were saying. They therefore reacted by *discouraging* them from using their mother tongues for educational or other purposes in the classroom. I have observed that when black learners speak in their mother tongue, they further divided themselves into ethnic groups. The Zulus interact with Zulus, the same with Sotho's and Ndebele. The advantage is with the learners who are multi lingual they moved across the tables in the classroom talking to different learners. The white learners seemed to be reserved and contributing less towards discussions, because they were not arising hands as frequently as they are used to in the other classroom. But they seem content to just listen to the conversations around them and speaking Afrikaans to both coloureds and Afrikaans speaking learners.

One may relate this to the fact that when white learners speak Afrikaans, they know very well that the other learners in the classroom cannot understand what they are saying. Two of the teachers who discourage the use of indigenous languages in classrooms do not think that they are being inconsistent by encouraging these white Afrikaans learners to use Afrikaans in the classroom because, according to their way of thinking, it is necessary for all other learners to learn Afrikaans as a medium of communication and education but not necessarily other languages. This assumption on the part of these teachers creates a barrier in communication at the same time that it enables white Afrikaans learners to retain their position of the dominance in the power relations of the school and to exclude other learners from benefiting from the education that is being offered. One of these teachers, Johan justified the ban on indigenous languages in the following words:

The worst thing for me is when the learners speak their own language, and I don't understand them. Especially when they are swearing, I don't understand them and this frustrates me. When you ask them to explain what they have said, they do not tell the truth, so they must not speak their own language in my class.

Another of the teachers, Acha, gave an example she used to discourage learners from using their home language in the classroom:

What I [...] do is, when a learner speaks in his or her mother tongue, I also respond in *my* own mother tongue. And learners will [then] ask me to translate what I said. When I refuse, they think that I was swearing at them and they will switch back to English. I have done this to give them a taste of their own medicine. This behaviour has stopped learners to speak their own language, which suits me fine because the only language I understand is English.

There were also some coloured and white learners who were in agreement with the teacher that black learners should not use their mother tongue in the classroom. One of them expressed it thus:

I think learners from other race groups must not use their mother tongue in class in the presence of other learners because they know that we do not understand the language. When speaking in their mother tongue, they are discriminating against us, because it's [an] English and

Afrikaans medium school. Their language has no place in class.

I prefer to work alone. I find it difficult to work with learners from races different to mine because they speak in their own mother tongue amongst themselves which I do not understand, and they do not interpret what they said to me, so I feel left out of the discussions. It makes me feel stupid and degraded. I will rather work alone than in a group.

When a new group of learners with a different racial identity from those already represented in the school, enters a white school, the school does not change the curriculum to accommodate the different needs of these new learners. Teachers simply continue to interact with learners as though they were English or Afrikaans first language speakers. (Jansen, 1999; Soudien & Sayed, 2003b; & Moletsane, 1999). Jansen (1999) has observed that, in such schools, learners are subjected to a powerful and sometimes overt curriculum and discourse of domination and superiority. Those teachers, who do not allow black learners to speak in their first languages in the classroom but compel them to speak in either English or Afrikaans, are discriminating (in terms of the human rights provisions of the South African Constitution) against the home languages of these learners. This attitude on the part of teachers, as I have already observed above, sends a clear message to learners from different racial groups that English is a better language than their own African languages because it is a language of international communication throughout the world unlike, for example, Zulu, which is only spoken by a particular ethnic group in South Africa. This attitude assigns to English an unfair advantage over the other official languages of the country. It is on the grounds of this belief in the importance of English that learners are encouraged to master English rather than to communicate in their own languages. But this arrangement also reveals one of the fundamental flaws in the qualifications of teachers who are required to teach learners from many different racial and home language backgrounds in the same class, although they have not been trained to do so (Meier, 2005; Jansen, 1999; Moletsane; 1999; & Soudien & Sayed, 2003b).

The findings of this study have seem to suggest that it is unfair for any teacher who is not also fluent in one or more of the indigenous languages of Africa to be truly effective in teaching classes of mixed racial compositions in South Africa. It is necessary for all teachers to be able to converse in at least one of the major indigenous languages of the country so that they are placed in a position to converse in the home language of at least some of the learners in the class, and so that

they are able to respond to the questions of learners in the learners first language. This is not to deny that a mastery of English is a very useful and desirable skill, especially for scholars and academics, both in South Africa and throughout the world. It most certainly is. But to harp on that point to the exclusion of the historical context and considerations of justice and equality, is to miss the point. In the situation in which we find ourselves after 46 years of oppressive apartheid laws and over three centuries of colonial oppression that were designed to make blacks *feel* that they were inferior to whites in every way, it is a fundamental political necessity for the government to affirm mother tongue education as indispensable in *all* the schools of South Africa, whether they be formerly white-only, ex-Model C schools or all-black schools.

One of the teachers in the sample agreed that many of the communication and interactive difficulties that occurred between the white Afrikaans-speaking teachers and the English-speaking learners could be attributed to a “lack of skills in English proficiency”. As I have already noted above, the video footage clearly shows how those teachers who lack English-language proficiency skills often stammer and then change back to speaking in Afrikaans, which can cause a communication barrier.

Other findings from the video footage showed that there were indeed teachers like Jeannie who tried to accommodate the needs of learners from different racial groups by attempting to speak one or two words in an African language. This indicates that she acknowledge the need to use indigenous languages in the classrooms. . It also shows that she was trying to affirm the self-respect and feelings of self-worth of the learners by trying to meet them some way so as to make them feel accepted in their classroom and in the school. The communication and interactions in the classrooms of this teacher was lively and enjoyable, compared to teachers who actually discouraged learners from using their first language in the classroom.

The options that therefore confront black learners in the school is that they should either not communicate in their first languages or else that they should learn to become proficient in English. When learners are not allowed to communicate in their first language, it deprives them, as I have already noted above, of being able to utilise their prior knowledge in the construction of personal and educational meanings that are unique to themselves (Lindeque & Vandeyar, 2004). Research shows that when certain languages are prohibited, the voices of those who speak these languages

are silenced and rejected (Nieto, 2002). The prohibitions of languages are causing a breakdown and difficulties in communication and interaction.

5.6 Cultural differences

The available literature on this topic substantiates the findings of the case study, namely that the absence of shared communicative frames of reference, procedural protocols, rules of etiquette and systems of discourse make it difficult for learners and teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds genuinely to understand one another and for learners fully to convey an accurate impression of their true intellectual abilities and talents (Gay, 2000; & Tiedt, & Tiedt, 1990). Jansen (2004) contends that learners who come from backgrounds that are different from those of the teacher will inevitably be disadvantaged because the mere physical integration of learners into white schools and the historical culture and ethos of these schools does not automatically prepare the schools or their staff for the difficulties they will encounter as they try to accommodate black learners and make them feel welcome.

There is a great deal of evidence in the findings of this case study that failures in communication between teachers and learners and between learners are caused by the cultural and linguistic differences between the teachers and learners concerned and because none of these teachers has ever received any government-sponsored training, guidance or education in how to accommodate learners from racial and cultural backgrounds that are different from their own. All of the teachers and some of the learners agreed that cultural and linguistic differences were the major cause of communication breakdown. Most of the teachers complained that black learners were very loud and noisy, and that they thought nothing of shouting to one another from opposite sides of a classroom when they wanted to communicate. Very loud and assertive speech in personal and formal situations is taboo in European-derived cultures whereas in African cultures, it is merely an attempt to be polite. (Terblanche & Terblanche 2004). This is but one example of how cultural differences can interfere with relations between people from different cultural and racial backgrounds. The fact that some black learners do not look directly into the eyes of a teacher during communication is another example of a widely misunderstood cultural difference. In African cultures, it is a sign of disrespect to gaze directly into the eyes of an authority figure while communicating.

Some of the teachers also observed that black male learners have no respect for a teacher who is a woman on the grounds that women in indigenous cultures have no status and are therefore not entitled to express their opinions to males (although they may do so to other women). This is another cultural difference that can give rise to major offence in European-derived cultures that are founded on ideals of gender equality and equal respect and opportunities for both men and women because they embody human rights for which women had to campaign for many long and arduous years before they were granted (Bhana, 1999). It was also observed by white teachers that black learners seem to have no respect for time as it is regarded in Western-orientated cultures. The reason for this, it is averred, is that blacks look at the position of the sun when they want to measure time. The white teachers also complained that black male learners would insert their hands into their pockets while they were talking to teachers. In Western-orientated cultures, this is a sign of deep disrespect towards the person to whom one is talking in a formal situation (although it would be acceptable in informal and casual circumstances). Keeping one's hands in one's pockets while addressing an authority figure is also a non-verbal way of indicating the boredom and lack of interest on the part of the speaker towards the teacher, and many teachers like Jeannie in the study found it very difficult not to be angry with learners when they did this. The teachers who had to deal with such behaviour interpreted them to mean that the learners who practised them simply lacked basic standards of decency and good manners, and they were a cause of immense frustration and anger for these teachers (Gay, 2000; & Tiedt, & Tiedt, 1990).

Some learners and teachers believed that when new learners from different racial and cultural backgrounds were enrolled in their schools, it was up to them to internalise the predominant Afrikaans culture that had formed the basis of the school's historical identity. These teachers complained about the cultural differences between the teachers and the learners in the school. What is required is that both teachers and learners from different background need to take the responsibility for understanding one another's cultures and languages. If they did this they, would be able to understand each other's cultures and be able to work out techniques and methods for accommodating cultural and linguistic differences. At the time of the study, the responsibility for educating oneself in the culture and language of the other cultures and languages of the country was only laid on the shoulders of black learners. It was expected of black learners that they

familiarise themselves with white cultural norms and languages while the white teachers who are responsible for their education were not expected to make any attempt to learn about African culture or to learn an African language with a reasonable degree of fluency. None of the teachers in the sample seems able to detect the inherent flaw in the logic in Jeannie's utterance that, "I can't explain why black learners cannot understand white culture."

The other cultural difference that the teachers (Lesedi and Acha) in the sample observed was the fact that the Coloured learners liked to attract the attention of the teacher in the classroom by talking about personal matters such as their boyfriends. A female black learner will not talk to an adult in authority such as a teacher about her boyfriends because this kind of talk is taboo in African cultures. Because of these numerous cultural differences between the races of South Africa, most of the teachers typified the black learners as noisy and disruptive and uncooperative and lazy. But the root of the problem resided in the differences between the teachers' and the learners' and between learners frames of reference. The teachers named Jeannie and Johan summed this up in the following words:

[Because] there are basic cultural differences that are in our cultures, I feel both teachers and learners have to work together and establish some basic norms and standards that we have to agree upon. One of them should be: "I respect you, you respect me. If I disrespect you, then I can expect you to disrespect me too. When I look at you, you need to look me back in the eye when I speak to you."

Two of the other teachers (Hein and Johan) in the sample express their opinion that being required to teach learners from different cultural backgrounds was not conducive to effective communication and interactions with the learners. They pointed out that they constantly found themselves in situations in which they had to think very carefully about their actions and words and how all the learners would react to them, if they did not want to risk unnecessary conflict in the classroom. It is being demonstrated in the study that teachers tiptoe over issues and avoid jokes that might have any cultural or racial connotations because these could be a source of offence to at least some learners in the classroom. One teacher Johan remarked:

Because of the backgrounds that are not the same, I find myself in a situation that I had to think about my action and how learners will react to it so that I do not cause conflict in

the class unnecessarily. [The] motto that I live by [is]: “Be friendly to everybody and respect me, and I will respect you.”

The attitude of this teacher (Johan) was different from the attitudes of teacher (Hein) described in this text in that this teacher was prepared to acknowledge differences in the racial and cultural heritage of the black learners in the class, and was therefore determined to take whatever steps were necessary to accommodate these learners by being sensitive to their possible reactions to his words. At the root of all these communication and interaction problems lies the issue of respect. It is because of a lack of proper respect for the dignity, integrity and welfare of other human beings in education contexts that some teachers and learners feel angry, insulted, resentful and compromised.

These findings are in accord with those of West and Turner (2004) who noted that communication involves people who interact with varying intentions, motivations and levels of ability. The messages they exchanged in communication may have more than one meaning and many different layers of significance. Martin and Nkanyama (2004) point out that all constituted meanings have cultural consequences. It is therefore important that people such as teachers take cognisance of the cultural significance of the communications that they generate. For example, teacher, Johan who was mentioned above reacted to the possibility of causing offence to learners by proactively censoring all his communications when interacting with learners from different cultural backgrounds. It would be valuable if teachers and learners and learners and learners agreed together to some mutually acceptable rules of protocol and etiquette on which to base their communication and interactions.

The Schramm and Osgood model that was discussed in chapter 3 could be applied for just such a purpose. Schramm and Osgood’s (1948) model of interpersonal communication affirm that a person’s experience, cultural assumptions and genetic makeup exercise a decisive influence on the way that a person communicates with others. This implies that the relationship between learners and teachers, and learners and learners, is not a simple one-way communication process that it operates in two directions on the basis of the cultural differences and meanings that both parties need to take into account if they want to avoid “noise” for obscuring what they are trying to convey.

Other white teachers have experienced what Dolby (2001, 2002) calls *cultural shock*. Because they are ignorant of ways to interact effectively and respectfully with black learners, they have found themselves involved in cultural misunderstandings when they differ from learners on the importance of matters such as coming to class on time (punctuality) and keeping quiet while other learners are speaking (respect). These teachers have found themselves in a double bind because although they were ignorant of the cultural background of other learners, they allowed the same learners to feel that they were being granted the freedom to be themselves.

And yet, there are also teachers like Jeannie (as the video footage shows) who were making a special effort to accommodate learners from different racial groups by including them in the curriculum, for example, through various elements of African culture such as indigenous music, dance and poetry readings. They also actively drew on the diversity inherent in their learners to create a representative cultural, ethnic and racial diversity in the processes of knowledge acquisition and skills development. By doing this, these teachers sent a clear message to black learners that their culture was so important that it warranted the time and energy that they spent in creatively investigating it, drawing it into their teaching and including it in the curriculum.

In the video footage it shows that although the learners are from different cultures, they had accepted one another. When teacher Jeannie included African tradition in their curriculum the learners seem to enjoy to interact with one another and also to participate in the music, dance and poetry reading. All learners looked comfortable in their roles.

Research conducted by Vandeyar and Killen (2006) demonstrated that in those cases in which teachers interacted with learners from similar cultural backgrounds to their own to the exclusion of learners from different cultural backgrounds, the learners with whom they interacted felt a sense of belonging. These teachers, like Hein, constantly reinforced their communication and interactions by encouraging these learners to participate in the classroom. But they were curt, and dismissive to learners from other racial backgrounds, in ways that were evident to all the learners in classroom. The video footage clearly shows that some of the white teachers (Hein and Johan) were affirming and encouraging to white learners because they answered their questions and encouraged them in

communicative interaction in the classroom. But even as they did this, the video footage shows how they ignored the black learners who were raising their hands in futile attempts to gain their attention. The video footage also shows how these same teachers would lean over the desks of white learners and help them individually with whatever problems they encountered in their work. The overall pattern that I detected was therefore that these particular white teachers went out of their way to affirm, encourage and promote the white learners in their classroom to the exclusion of all learners from other races. This was discouraging for learners from other racial groups and it brought anonymity among learners.

In spite of the fact that coloured learners have created a distinctive kind of multi-ethnic youth culture that they use in personal communications and interactions in order to express themselves personally and collectively, the evidence shows that none of the teachers involved paid any attention at all to their culture. This is yet another example of how teachers deliberately exclude members of a particular cultural group on the basis of their ethnicity. One of these Coloured learners described their distinctive culture in the following words:

Everything is modern. Nobody follows their real culture anymore, and they no longer do things that their mothers and grandmothers used to do even though they know they are supposed to follow them. They have formulated their own culture at school that is composed of different races.

Black and Indian learners express the point of view that coloured and white learners did not interact with other learners who were different from them because of their attitude towards them and their culture. They claimed that because white and coloured learners insulted, were rude and talked down to them, they preferred not to have any interaction at all with them. Black learner expressed this in the following words:

People have an attitude towards us and our culture. They are not friendly. [They are] rude and bully us. Others do not want us because we are from a different race, [a race] other than theirs. [And] so they look down upon us. Others find fault with everything we do and they pick up on us. One just has to stand one's ground.

It is noteworthy, however, that more than half the learners from all the groups in the study (namely, eight out of twelve) felt they did in fact get along with learners from different cultural backgrounds because they respected one another and the cultures of learners from other racial backgrounds. They also affirmed that they were interested in getting to know more about all the cultures that were represented in the classroom. The spin-off from their interest in the cultures of learners who were different from them was that they could pursue common goals in the classroom and gradually acquire a more detailed appreciation of one another's differences, customs and cultural riches. For such people, cultural differences are an opportunity for learning, enrichment and appreciation – and not something to be feared. On such learner remarked:

We get along with one another in the class by having a social life together. [Thus], for example, we celebrate each other's birthdays, everybody makes an effort to know and accommodate each other, and when we have fights we sort them out amongst ourselves and we respect each other's culture and language.

All the participants agreed that non-verbal codes could be used consciously as a weapon in communications between learners and teachers and among learners themselves. All learners strongly agreed that body language often offended teachers and learners from different racial groups, and that when this happened unconsciously, as it did in most cases it was the result of cultural differences. The learners felt that when teachers and learners interpreted these body-language messages according to their own cultural presuppositions (rather than the culture of the sender of the message), they became a cause of conflict and offence. Both teachers and learners acknowledged that nonverbal communication should be affirmed, expressed and interpreted verbally because it arises from a different frame of reference. There can also be no doubt that there are many learners who *consciously* use body language as a tactical weapon to offend one another in the classroom. If such a perpetrator is criticised, he or she can always answer, "Well, it is certainly not offensive in *my* culture."

5.7. Class participation

What is important in class participation in desegregated classrooms is who contributes the most and who contributes the least, as observed by Jansen in his research (Jansen, 1999). A researcher thus needs to analyse the extent to which learners interact with their teachers and with one another.

The video footage made it clear that some of the teachers (Johan and Hein) did not encourage much participation in their classroom. These teachers stood in front of the class and read to the learners. Since they obviously did not expect the learners to participate in any way, the learners simply sat silently and listened. These same teachers also looked strict and maintained such a distant and aloof attitude that the learners remained quiet. In some instances, teachers concentrated solely on the white learners who participated in the class by responding to the teacher, but when black learners tried to attract the attention of teachers by also raising their hands, these teachers just ignored them. This is an obvious example of a teacher-induced breakdown in communication between teachers and learners. These teachers created a barrier or “noise” that blocked the channels of communication in these cases by refusing to respond to the learners who had raised their hands. Since these learners were forced to “do their own thing” because they could not participate in the lessons, they invariably underperformed academically in the long-run and were therefore no doubt branded as “underperformers” and learners who were “unprepared” for the high standard of education in the classrooms of previously all-white schools, as also observed in Moletsane’s research(Moletsane, 1999).

The ignorance of learners by the teachers created the perception that black learners were “dull” or “lazy” or that they were not interested in improving their academic performance. But the truth was that these black learners had been set up to fail, and the teachers who taught them had made them the victims of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Since it was quite obvious to the learners that the teachers in the school were actively hostile towards them, they lost all interest in the academic programme and in their ability to perform. Part of this setup was that the white learners in the classroom would excel in interaction and communication because they were the only ones given opportunities to respond to the teacher's questions. By focusing exclusively on the white learners in the classroom, these teachers encouraged them and affirmed their self-esteem and self-confidence to the detriment of the black learners who were ignored, and dismissively treated. The way in which a teacher interacts with learners in a classroom will always influence the standard of that learner’s communication and performance. If learners understand and perceive that a teacher likes them, they will obviously try to do the best they can and justify the teacher's confidence in them. Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. Whenever learners become convinced that they are being ignored, undermined and dismissed by a teacher, they will do whatever is needed to show the teacher that they are what the teacher has already decided that they are. The learner to learner

interaction and communication is lacking amongst the learners in (Hein and Johan) classroom. The learners are more passive, sit and listen to the teacher, or those that are not given attention, start talking in their own language or writing messages to one another without giving attention to other learners who are concentrating in the classroom.

There is also evidence in the video footage that shows that some of the teachers (Jeannie, and Lesedi) in the school encouraged class participation among all the learners, and that they clearly expected responses from all the races and ethnic groups represented in the classroom. These teachers were also more demonstrative emotionally and were not bothered by the learners' use of their first languages in the classroom. They also actively encouraged black learners to include African dance, music, and poetry in their presentations, essays, speeches, demonstrations, and so on. They also encouraged learners from other racial groups to present similar demonstrations of their own ethnic and racial culture wherever appropriate. The atmosphere in these classes was respectful, creative and conducive to learning and achievement of all kinds.

The findings show that there were differences in the extent to which learners participated in the classroom. Three of the teachers from the sample said that each learner participated to a greater or lesser extent. Two of the teachers in the sample contradicted this statement when they observed that all the learners “participated equally”. One of these teachers (Acha) made the following remarks:

It depends on their moods. Sometimes it is blacks who are participating more; sometimes it's coloureds, whites and Indians. [They] never [participate] simultaneously, but one group at a time. It seems as if they are giving each other a chance to participate.

There are different reasons why learners do not participate equally in the classroom. In some classes they do not participate equally because of the divisions that exist among themselves. Among blacks, cliques are established on the basis of ethnic group. The racial group that gave teachers the greatest problems were the coloureds (this has already been discussed above). In one particular classroom, these coloured learners undermined and intimidated the teacher by saying that she was not “good enough” to teach them because she was a foreigner. This was a clear example of how learners can destroy the self-confidence of a teacher and sabotage communicative

interactions. These communicative interactions therefore work in three directions – from the teacher to the learners, and from the learners to the teacher, and from one group of learners to another. No matter the origin, cause of such destructive communications, their effect on learning and achievement in the classroom is always disastrous because they destroy the very foundation of confidence and mutual respect that is an indispensable condition for excellence in education.

There were some teachers who believed that all learners participated equally in the classroom because they had been together for a long time at the school, were all well acquainted with one another, and they understood one another's strengths and weaknesses. These teachers expanded this observation of theirs that “all the learners were all the same” by attributing it to the fact that they were all “comfortable” with one another because they were all well acquainted. One of these teachers (Johan) remarked:

All learners participate in the classroom because they are exactly the same. They know each other for a very long time; they feel comfortable with one another. There is no problem. It is just [the] Africans in [their] class: they do not want to participate, especially the boys. They just keep quiet. You can try your level best. If they do not want to participate, there is nothing he or anyone can do.

The observations made by these teachers indicated that there were problems that emanated from learners which undermined communicative interactions in the classroom. These problems were caused by at least two sets of problems. The first problem was that certain individual learners were uncooperative, disruptive, arrogant and abusive towards particular teachers. We have already noted the case of the female teacher mentioned above whom a group of learners discriminated against on the grounds of her foreign origin (xenophobia) and because she was a woman and not a man (gender discrimination). They justified both their xenophobia and their gender discrimination on the grounds that these were attitudes which constituted an essential part of their ethnic group culture. But whatever the causes, these learner-generated obstructions to learning created an atmosphere that was unpleasant in the classroom such that no learning could take place. To add to the general problems, the teachers concerned felt that there was nothing they could do to change the minds or attitudes of the learners who were determined to destroy the atmosphere of learning and to prevent any learning from taking place in the classroom.

Some learners claimed that they did not participate in the class because some teachers did not like to be interrupted in the classroom. When they were interrupted, the teachers became irritated and angry with the learners who did so and often resorted to calling them insulting and abusive names. Half of all the learners from all the groups did not participate in classrooms because of the introversion that was a constituent part of a personality and manifested in the form of shyness. Whilst many learners are naturally more inclined by their inherent nature towards introversion rather than towards extroversion, their natural degree of introversion (which manifests as shyness and an inability or unwillingness to communicate and interact) may be aggravated by the conditions in a class that is being taught by a teacher who makes his or her racism clear in the discriminatory manner and the way in which he or she confirms the self-esteem and identity of favoured learners from particular racial and ethnic groups to the exclusion of all the other learners.

In contrast to this, those learners who were more inclined to extroversion because of various forms of outgoing and disruptive behaviour, they laughed, for example, when other learners (depending on their identity) gave wrong answers or when a teacher answered them in a rude manner in front of the class. This kind of behaviour had negative effect on some of the more sensitive learners because although they had been insulted and degraded in front of the whole class, they had no recourse to any remedy of any kind. One of them remarked:

When people laugh at me I feel degraded, small. They can make fun of you for weeks to come, or give you a nickname as a result of your answer, which I hate with a passion.

There is also evidence in the findings that the extent of class participation among learners depended on the way in which the learners personally perceived themselves. Olivier and Du Plooy-Cilliers (2000:35) explain that perception takes place when you physically observe something or someone, and then organise and interpret what you have observed. This is a subjective process and is therefore unique to every person. If then we perceive ourselves in a favourable manner, we will be more likely to work confidently with others. But if we perceive ourselves unfavourably, we will be more likely to interact with others from a position of weakness and not fulfil our potential and abilities (Fielding, 1997). The personal perceptions that teachers and learners have of themselves are therefore bound to exert a decisive influence on the manner in which they interact with others. Teachers who regard themselves unfavourably at a very deep and

unconscious level, will, in all likelihood, be, easily offended, aggressive and defensive in their interactions with other people, whether merely in personal conversations or in the manner in which they handle all the learners in a classroom. But if their levels of self-respect and self-esteem are high, they will feel worthy enough not to feel threatened by interactive communications with learners from other racial and ethnic groups. An atmosphere that is conducive to education can only be created when a teacher accords equal treatment to all learners and when each learner has a sufficient number of opportunities to make his or her voice heard in the classroom.

5.7.1 Teaching style

The teacher's *teaching style* influences the way in which learners participate in the classroom. Repeated observation of the video footage confirmed my supposition that there were differences between the teaching and interaction styles of different teachers in the school. There was one group of teachers in the school who were very strict, stiff in their personal manner, and aloof in their interactions (Johan and Hein). They usually stood in front of the blackboard and wrote and talked at the same time without ever even glancing at the learners in order to ascertain their reactions. Their particular style of teaching learners could be described in terms of the metaphor by means of which learners are regarded as inert, passive and empty “vessels” into which the teacher is obliged to “pour” information. Such teachers do not encourage class participation, and the learners in their classrooms are not allowed to move around the classroom for any purpose at all without express permission from the teacher. Such teachers do not even communicate among themselves. Instead, they devote themselves to completing the content of the syllabus rather than checking whether or not learners have correctly understood the part of the syllabus that they are currently being taught. They therefore cultivate a hard shell to conceal their inner selves from personal involvement, and no one is allowed to penetrate that shell. Although they may appear to the public as hard, they are often warm human beings. One of the teachers, Hein, in the sample expressed sentiments that are typical of this kind of personality type:

I work from the principle that I am like a professor at a university. I have got a responsibility to teach. I teach Grades 11 and 12. I feel that they [the learners] are old enough to be responsible for their work, so I do not check their homework and exercise that frequently. I am teaching, explaining on the board or use a projector and transparency. I like using the board because I can illustrate whatever I want to, so I do not

feel any sympathy if they do not do their work. They must just listen or ask questions if they have any.

Some of the teachers, as we have already noted above, interacted only with learners from one racial group. They made a point of giving these learners individual attention and of ignoring the others in the classroom. When other learners tried to attract their attention, they ignored them until the period was almost over and then attended to these learners as best they could in the inadequate time left.

In contrast to the kind of teachers (Jeannie, Lesedi, Acha) mentioned above, there were other teachers who used a natural, free and emotionally uninhibited manner in their communicative interactions with the learners, and they involved all the learners in the classroom in their lessons and encouraged all learners to participate. They also encouraged individual learners to take the initiative and make informed decisions in the context of what happened in the classroom. They also accorded to them the freedom to evaluate one another according to criteria that had been agreed upon by the teachers and the learners together, and they encouraged the periodic exchange of leadership roles among the learners. In spite of the fact that teacher (Jeannie) used both English and Afrikaans in her instruction, she also made some attempt to accommodate other learners by trying to speak in their African languages. She also made use of a stimulating variety of teaching methods and techniques such as role-play, discussions, collaboration and group work. Jeannie made the following observations:

For example, one learner (black) raised her hand and told the teacher that she disagreed with the teacher's view. Other learners were laughing at her. Instead of shouting or feeling disrespected by the learner, the teacher moved closer to the learner and listened to her argument, [explained] why she disagreed, and explained her view to her again until both of them were satisfied.

How teachers interact with learners is part of their personal style of teaching because it defines the kind of communication and interaction that will prevail in the classroom. Teachers, who devote themselves exclusively to writing on the blackboard to the exclusion of live interactions with learners, will undoubtedly be experienced as remote from the learners they are trying to teach. But those teachers (Jeannie, Lesedi, Acha) who move around the classrooms and lean over learners'

desks in order to help them with particular problems, will be experienced by learners as friendly and caring. Teachers of this kind also encourage more interaction and participation in classroom events. Such teachers also encourage learners by praising them, by patting them on their shoulders, by saying things like “Well done!” and by hugging their learners as a parent would do. Those teachers, who are more demonstrative, encourage learners to be closer to them. But learners remain distant from teachers who are aloof and remote because they are afraid of them and therefore enjoy fewer interactions with them. The demonstrative teachers encourage active interaction amongst learners. The learners look comfortable with one another and working together.

The interactions that learners have with one another also depend on the arrangement of the class and what their teachers regard as appropriate techniques and methods for promoting learning in the classroom. Some teachers (Jeannie, Lesedi, and Acha), for example, encourage interactions during teaching by making creative use of group work, songs and dancing, and the dramatisation of scenarios where this fits in with the topics that are being dealt with in the curriculum. Wherever teachers are willing to be more demonstrative and open in their lessons, learners usually respond by providing opportunities for more communicative interactions. As I have already noted above, learners participated far more in some classes than in others, while, in some classes, there might be a particular racial group that is more reserved. In the best kind of classes, all learners participate equally. Whether this happens or not depends on the personal style that teachers bring to their teaching, the quality of the freedom that they accord to learners and the kind of treatment and attitudes that learners experience at the hands of their fellow learners and their teachers.

5.8. Verbal and non-verbal communication

The literature confirms that verbal and non-verbal communication frequently occurs simultaneously because the non-verbal communication usually complements and reinforces the message contained in verbal communications. Verbal communication is communication that relies, in one way or another, on the use and projection of words while non-verbal communication is communication that is effected by some means other than words (Cleary, et al., 2002; Knapp & Hall, 2005; Hybel & Weaver II, 2004). The communication between teachers and learners and between learners in the classroom involves two-way interactions between people from different

backgrounds and different cultures. The quality of the conversations which those teachers and learners, and amongst learners have with one another either flows easily or contributes to poor communication. The challenges faced by the learners and teachers and learners learners in these case study were mostly caused by different frames of reference because the majority of the teachers and only some of the learners shared a common frame of reference. When teachers and learners and learners and learners communicate, they need to articulate their messages clearly so that no misunderstandings or unnecessary barriers intervene.

Research findings from the literature (Muhammad, 2005) explain diversity in the classroom in terms of the socialization to which all participants have been exposed in their respective home environments. The more the home environments of teachers and learners and learner and learner differ, the greater will be the difference in the patterns of socialisation with which they emerge as adults or young adults. The greater the differences in socialisation between new learners and the patterns of socialisation to which the majority of learners and teachers in the school have been exposed, the more difficult it will be for new learners to adapt themselves to the school's well-established historical culture and traditions, and the less likely it will be that these new learners will be able to participate successfully in interactions and communications in the school.

One white learner expressed this in the following words:

I am aware that some learners do not get along. For example, a group of Afrikaans learners do not get along or interact with blacks at all – not because they do not like them or are racist or anything like that, but because of the way they have been brought up by their parents. They do not mix with blacks. They look down on them.

An examination of circumstances that prevail in schools such as the one I studied reveals that in spite of the government's efforts to desegregate and to make all public schools democratic, the values of the dominant group still function as the "official" and historically entrenched values of the school (Meier, 2005; & Jansen, 1999). This has critical important implications for teachers and learners alike, despite the influx of new learners from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, very little has changed in the way that these schools think of themselves as institutions with a distinctive historical and cultural identity. This is what happened in the school which provided the case study for this research.

In this school, the majority of the school teachers are white and there a few black teachers as observed by (Jansen, 1999; & Van Heerdan, 2000). This means that most of the teachers in the school operated from a cultural condition and frame of reference that is different from all the new learners from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (West & Turner, 2006). The video offers an idea of the racial and ethnic complexion of the teachers at the school. When one saw how some of the teachers (Hein and Johan) struggling to interact with the learners in their classrooms, one realised that their command of spoken English was certainly not up to the task. I also noticed how, they began to stammer in the middle of a lesson, they would change back to speaking in Afrikaans. The majority of the teachers (Jeannie, Lesedi and Acha) were, however, more comfortable using English than Afrikaans. The use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction by some of the teachers (Hein and Johan) served to widen the interactional gap between African and Indian learners who were anything but fluent in Afrikaans, and the resultant breakdown in communication made these learners feel that they did not belong because they were unfamiliar with the language of instruction.

The video also showed how some of the teachers (Jeannie, Acha and Lesedi) were more demonstrative and outgoing in their interactions with learners. These teachers used affirming non-verbal communications and encouraging gestures to mediate the content of the curriculum. They were also more playful and had the ability to come down to the level of the learners in order to convey subject content more graphically and successfully. They gave examples in their lessons that resonated with the everyday life experience of the learners. It has already been noted how some of the teachers (Hein and Johan) kept all learners at arm's length by means of their body language and by sticking to the blackboard and providing information over their shoulder as they wrote. The personal teaching styles of individual teachers was therefore crucial to the success (or otherwise) of the presentation of the content of the lesson. In the end, the way in which the teacher *presented* the lesson (i.e. the teachers' personal teaching style) made a crucial and decisive difference to the quality of the interactions that occurred in the classroom.

Some of the teachers (Hein and Johan) used the uni-directional teaching style (without any input or observations from the learners) to present their lessons. In these circumstances, the learners

were obliged to observe strict silence and watch whatever it was that the teacher was doing. These teachers exhibited little or no emotion in their classrooms. They presented themselves as rigid, remote to learners.

The majority of black, coloured and Indian learners agreed that non-verbal communication between learners made the teachers irritable and angry when they observed them. They attributed this negative reaction to a misunderstanding regarding the cultural differences. One learner remarked:

The conflict in most cases with non-verbal communication is a result of cultural differences between us learners and sometimes even teachers. Either one of us misinterpreted the message or it results in conflict.

By way of contrast to the other racial and ethnic groups, the white learners in the study agreed that the teachers did not use much body language and that they resorted only to what they called “natural gestures”. As one of these learners said:

Teachers don't use body language. It is only when some learners don't like the teachers [that] instead of sitting down and looking in front of them, they sit and look [in] the other direction and ignores the teacher. And that makes the teacher angry and it disrupts the class.

The noticeable differences of opinion and interpretation that were produced by these different groups of learners have led me to conclude that the perceived differences arise out the treatment that the learners receive in the classroom and in their responses to one another.

The findings that were obtained from the interviews show that although all of the teachers agreed that verbal communication plays an integral part in their communication and interaction in the classroom, they have however all experienced hindrances and barriers to communication. They are also of the opinion that the issue of the language of instruction (and all the difficulties that arise out of the inability of the learners to understand the language being spoken) was at least one major cause of such breakdowns. One teacher Hein expressed this problem in the following way:

Most black learners do not understand English or Afrikaans. And when we give them work, they do not even listen

properly, and they end up giving wrong answers. The black kids do their own thing their own way. They are not forced to be at the school.

The same teacher confessed that he did most of the talking in the classroom and that the learners merely listened.

The attitudes of teachers towards black learners make these learners feel alienated and uncomfortable. These learners feel that since they are not an integral part of the history, ethos and identity of the school, they have the option of leaving if they will not or cannot adhere to the rules of the school or understand and appreciate its ethos. But since the teacher is in a position of authority, the learners feel compelled to follow his or her instructions without question, and this affects the quality of their interactions with other learners and with the teachers themselves.

By contrast, some of the teachers in the sample regarded occasions of verbal communication as opportunities to be open with the learners about their feelings and emotions, and they also made use of group discussions as a means to promoting their educational goals in the classroom. These teachers were careful to include learners from different racial and ethnic backgrounds in group discussions so that the learners could enjoy opportunities of relating to learners from other racial and ethnic backgrounds in a friendly and open manner. Some of these teachers even used words and phrases in an African language to acknowledge the diversity of the learners in their classroom and to express their approval of and willingness to utilise African indigenous languages. As has already been noted above, some teachers used various forms of non-verbal communication such as touching of the learners, gestures such as patting them on their shoulders or hugging them as a way of assuring them that they were all in a safe environment. But one of these teachers, Jeannie, realised that she should not overdo it and should be careful to be sensitive to the taboos of the different cultures represented in the classroom. Other teachers devised various non-offensive methods of maintaining discipline. One teacher (Acha), for example, instead of screaming when a learner had done something wrong, would just stop and look at the learner concerned until the learner paid attention to what she was talking about. Once the learner had become aware of the teacher through this method, the teacher would use the ensuing silence to continue with the lesson.

The learners' understanding of the classroom dynamics was different from that of their teachers in the sense that attributed the success (or otherwise) of all the verbal and non-verbal communication that occurred to the teacher. One black learner said:

When you speak to the teacher, it depends how they respond back. Some of the teachers are open with you, easy to talk to, and it is an opportunity to voice your opinion. But you do not want to cross the paths of some of the teachers because you do not want to suffer their anger.

All the learners also identified the different levels of proficiency in various languages as the major cause of communication breakdown and as a barrier to the effectiveness of communication and interaction, even amongst learners.

Although there was common agreement amongst learners that the quality of verbal and non-verbal communication contributed to the success of communications and interactions, they attributed these factors to whether or not the teachers were "open" to learners and whether or not they possessed the skills that enabled them to interact with learners. They felt that it was up to the *teachers* to set the mood in the classroom that would be conducive to successful interactions. They also all agreed that one could not only rely on the content of non-verbal communication alone, but that all messages needed to be confirmed verbally by means of words.

5.9 The interaction of teachers with learners

Research that has been conducted in South African shows that the unique and distinctive personality of each teacher is one of most important determinant factors that contribute to best practices and interactions in the classroom. Research has shown that the suitability of a teacher's personality has to be supplemented by the quality of the teacher's presentation of the subject matter, by her or his personal demeanour, the quality of the rapport that she or he is able to establish with learners, and by the assumptions inherent in the teacher's philosophy of teaching (Lindeque & Vandeyar, 2008). These observations have important implications for the quality of interactions between teachers and learners because teachers are the authoritative figures in a classroom and it is inevitable that learners will look up to them as potential role models.

What I observed from the video footage confirms the findings set out in the previous paragraph, namely, that it is a teacher's personality that is the main determinant of good communication and interaction in a classroom. In some of the classes that were observed, the learners were very quiet and just listened in silence to the teacher because the teacher read to them and made no attempt to engage the learners. As the teacher called "Hein" put it in the interview: "I am the one who does most of the talking in the classroom. The learners must just listen." But other teachers (Jeannie, Lesedi and Acha) who appeared in the video footage tried all kinds of techniques and methods to accommodate learners and to engage their attention and interest. They asked learners, for example, to move their tables around into new and more stimulating patterns for various purposes (such as debates, dramatisations, and so on). They also resorted to talking personally to as many learners as they could, and gave them individual attention by touching them lightly, and by encouraging them in their schoolwork and in life in general. It was observable that when teachers used such methods, the learners reacted more positively towards them because they felt free to voice their opinions and to cooperate with the teachers in the presentation of their schoolwork. It was my observation that the majority of the teachers in the video footage readily tried to interact in a friendly and open manner with the learners and to make use of collaboration and group work as an instrument for promoting their pedagogical aims.

All of the teachers in the study agreed that they were satisfied with their personal levels of interaction with learners from different racial and cultural backgrounds. The teacher known as "Acha" expressed her view in the following words:

It is only improving now since I have arrived at the school. I am not satisfied but it has improved. I had several incidents with the coloured learners who threatened me and disrespected me because I am a foreigner and I give them a lot of work.

The teacher known as "Johan" also agreed that although he was satisfied, he entertained certain reservations for the following reasons:

Because of the different cultural backgrounds, I find myself in a situation that I have to think about my actions and how learners will react to them so that I do not cause unnecessary conflict. The motto that I live by with the learners is to be friendly to everybody [and] respect me and I will respect you.

I hate to have to shout at learners. So I try to help learners who are good to me.

Another teacher, Hein, did not talk about anything else to the learners apart from the official subject content in the curriculum. It is evident that some of these teachers felt that the necessity to interact with learners was their responsibility even though such interactions were fraught with barriers to communication.

Teacher Johan tried to be sensitive to the learners. By increasing the quality of his interactions with them, he was able to deepen his relationships with the learners. But it is obvious that teacher Jeannie had her own favourites, and she made her favouritism quite clear even though this created barriers between herself and the other learners. “There are learners that you like and those you do not like, and that is real life.”

Some learners confirmed the existence of favouritism and felt that it was unfair of teachers to have favourites in a classroom because the wrongdoings of the favourites were condoned while others had to suffer for theirs. They also noted that there were always white learners who were in complete harmony with some teachers because they are their favourites, shared similar frames of reference and interests. As one of the coloured learners said:

One teacher has a tendency to speak to white kids more than to other races. And she tells the rest of the class that they are her favourites because they do their work. She praises them a lot, but she is not OK with the black kids, and she verbalised [this] and said in class that she does not like them because they are lazy.

The atmosphere that this teacher (Jeannie) created through of her words and actions gave some learners the impression that she did not like them, and they felt rejected as a result. It is also probable that such perceptions exercise a destructive influence on the interactions between the teacher and the other learners in the classroom. Coloured, black and Indian learners expressed that;

those white learners who are favourites of the teachers we tend not to interact with them, because they get favours from teachers. It breeds hatred and jealousy amongst us the

learners, because they all get to be the favourites of the teachers.

The quality of teacher interactions also depends on the teachers' command of the language that is used as a medium of instruction. Some of the teachers did not interact with the learners because the learners to whom they were speaking could not understand Afrikaans and many of them also had a rudimentary understanding of English. In most cases, the teachers offered this as the reason why they felt compelled to give individual attention to white learners rather than to the learners from other groups.

The teachers named Jeannie and Lesedi claimed that they were emotionally open in their feelings and reactions towards their learners. Thus, for example, they would tell the learners if they felt angry, or when they were happy, they would also show it. And when they felt angry because some learners had openly demonstrated their lack of respect for them, they told them so. They also made various attempts to understand the culture of learners other than white learners. Teacher Lesedi intimated that she sometimes felt as though she were the social worker of the school because all learners felt free to come to her with all kinds of academic and personal problems in expectation that she would solve them.

Teacher Acha suggested that the main problem of teachers' and learners' interaction at the school was that there is still division amongst learners, according to race and ethnicity. She has observed that not all learners are equally or fairly treated by their teachers. There is dominance of the Afrikaans culture at the school. She claimed that the other barrier to communication is caused by lack of respect. Learners do not respect their teachers and other learners, especially Coloured boys. She feels that they are unruly, and the culture starts from home, it's not only at school. She also feels that white and Indian learners are hard workers; they have a tendency of working independently. She confirmed what had already been mentioned by other white teachers that black and coloured learners are lazy; they do a lot of talking in the classroom, rather than doing their work. They also prefer to work in a group so that they can help one another, or relied on the other learners to do the work for them. Although she had observed that the tendency of laziness is more with the boys than with the girls.

Several black, coloured, Indian and white learners admitted that some of the teachers interacted with them in a friendly, constructive and open way, mainly because the teachers showed them the respect that they had for these learners. And so these learners, in return, demonstrated their respect for these teachers. In these cases, the relationships between teachers and learners had progressed beyond the teacher-learner phase because the teachers behaved towards them more like friends or parents and they made it clear to the learners that they cared about them. These teachers tried as much as possible to make their learners comfortable and welcome in the classroom. Since they were excellent role models, they expected the same behaviour from the learners. They were also friendly and approachable, and the learners felt that they could trust these teachers with various details about their personal lives. All these factors made interactions in the classroom enjoyable and rewarding for all concerned. One of the learners said:

Some of the teachers interact with us like parents and friends. We have built a relationship with them and interact with them closely. Other teachers are strict and serious. We would not even make a wrong movement because we are afraid of them. We just listen to them in class but we do not interact with them.

But when there were differences in the ways in which other teachers behaved in a classroom setting, the learners reacted and interacted differently with such teachers. This observation is borne out by Mokhele (2004) who observes that a positive teacher-learner relationship has the potential of creating an environment that is conducive to good learning in the classroom, and that the quality of the learning environment determines whether or not a learner will be able to benefit from the teaching and learning situations that arise. If trust between teachers and learners is absent, teachers might resort to power and psychological intimidation to enforce their positions in the classroom, and this inevitably creates situations in which the ability to learn is compromised.

Some of the black, coloured and Indian learners felt that their teachers kept them at arm's length because some of teachers were rude and felt free to direct a great deal of anger towards them. They branded these teachers as racists because they mistreated black and coloured learners and unfairly and unjustly blamed on them everything that went wrong in the classroom. One black learner said:

I made a stupid mistake in the class. I think now that it is of a personal nature because the teacher is not letting go of it. It is because of the colour of my skin. If it was a white learner, the mistake [would] have been forgotten.

Some of the learners from this same group felt that some teachers manhandled them and were physically rough with them. (This occurred even though this kind of aggressive physical contact is specifically forbidden in the terms of the conditions of service for teachers in the Gauteng Department of Education.) One of the learners made the startling observation: “If learners are late in class, they will grab you by the neck and take you by your arm, and give you bruises.”

As has already been noted above, the quality of teacher-learner interaction depends on the personality of the teacher and on his or her aptitude for handling the human relationships that are a foundational part of pedagogical practice. Wherever trust prevails, communication may result in good educational experiences. But in those cases where learners distrust the power, motivations and ability of the teacher, the possibility of friendly and open communication is impeded. The literature on this topic is unanimous in declaring that good teacher-learner relationships should be based on mutual respect for one another. The extent to which the teacher becomes involved with the learners in the classroom influences the quality of interpersonal relationships that obtain between them. When they are dealing with groups of learners from diverse cultural groups, teachers need to take especial cognisance of the distinctively different social and cultural backgrounds from which these learners have emerged and also take note of the way in which differences in personal conditioning affect the quality of their communicative interactions in the classroom.

5.10 Learner-learner interaction

In spite of the above observations, it is clear that the responsibility for creative and helpful interactions between teachers and learners is not solely the responsibility of the teacher; it is also up to learners to do everything that they can to make classroom environments conducive to excellence in learning by being willing to share with other learners in the classroom what they have gained, irrespective of racial or ethnic origin and identity. As has already been noted, the

majority of black, coloured, and Indian learners were deeply satisfied with the quality of many classroom interactions. One of these learners made the following comment:

Some of the intelligent learners do not want to share their knowledge with us. Others are stingy. They just take from a relationship without giving back. Learners must share, but it must not be one-sided. All must make sacrifices at some point. Not only one group compromising but all of them must compromise as the need arises.

The uncompromising attitude of some learners was an indication that they were not prepared to accept one another, and this made it difficult for them to interact with other learners. One of the learners expressed this uncompromising attitude by saying:

They [the white learners] treat us with an attitude. They are rude to us. And white learners exclude us in their conversation. Because we do not understand Afrikaans, they will speak Afrikaans to us and refuse to interpret.

Such attitudes create barriers in communication. It is clear that white learners attempt to enforce their dominance in the power relationships of the school by using their language as a weapon in struggle for dominance. The message that they were sending by doing this was that unless learners from other racial backgrounds were prepared to learn their language, they were not prepared to interact with them. One may therefore argue from observing the divisions that are created by differences in language usage in schools that such language divisions can create even greater and far more serious divisions that are based on racial and ethnic identity rather than on language alone. This adds yet another layer to the complexity to the reasons for the breakdown in communication between learners from different racial backgrounds.

While one white learner confessed that he had encountered problems as he tried to interact with learners from other races, he was also aware that there were other learners to whom he related unsatisfactory. He said:

I know a group of Afrikaans learners who do not get along with African learners and do not interact with them, not because they are racist or anything like that, but, because of the way they have been brought up by their parents, they do not mix with blacks. They look down upon them.

This cause of divisions among learners from different racial backgrounds is confirmed by Muhammad (2005) who argues that from early childhood onwards, children are conditioned by their formal and informal experiences in the family and community culture in which they are raised. He notes that when children are taught how to behave, it is the parents who are their first teachers, and that what a child learns from his or her parents is the most deeply ingrained part of experience in the child's psyche. This is encapsulated in the English proverb, "The child is father of the man." Muhammad's (2005) observations are confirmed by home socialisation theory which notes that the various environments in which children are raised condition them in the distinctive socialisation patterns that determine their attitudes for the rest of their lives. These patterns of socialisation also influence their ability to cope with strange and novel conditions in their school environment. The more difficult it is for children to adapt to a school culture, the less likely it will be that such learners will be successful in their interactions in school.

One of the learners noted:

We had close friends from different racial groups other than [our] own. Our friendship ends at school. It does not get further than that, and it [remains] at a superficial level because at school we tolerate one another. We do not visit one another at home. We are sort of friends because we can tolerate one another, accept one another and respect each other, and also we have common interests as young people.

The other group of learners argued that they interacted with other learners because they claimed that they did not judge people by the colour of their skin and did not see colour because "they were all the same". They also believed they all applied the same standards of morality in their behaviour. "We are all the same, except for the colour of our skin and our personality."

This shows how the accommodation that learners have for one another strongly influenced the quality of their interactions with learners from other racial and ethnic groups. Such accommodation was in fact a distinct advantage, given the learners' awareness that they had no choice but to coexist with one another. One might indeed argue that the adherence of these learners to the colour blindness approach limited the scope of their communications with one another. But even though they turned a blind eye to their racial and cultural differences, their social relationships were never neutral but always reflected the power of inequalities in the

struggle for dominance in the power relations of the school. But these learners were also able to celebrate their differences and such celebration enriched their lives and provided the bedrock on which meaningful relationships could be built.

One of the other issues that learners identified as being a source of barriers in communication was their differences in religious beliefs. The learners in the school subscribe to a wide range of religious beliefs that included Muslim, Christian and African beliefs. Because some learners felt apprehensive and challenged by the diversity and differences they detected in these beliefs, they found themselves being unable to interact with other learners whose beliefs and convictions were different from theirs.

Another challenge that emphasised a sense of difference among the learners immersed when learners used their home languages in the presence of other learners who could not understand what they were saying – a practice that excluded them from conversations. This demonstrates that language is not a neutral entity but that it can be used as a weapon in the struggle for power and dominance. Although human beings do not normally use their languages for these purposes, such behaviour was frequently used in the struggle to gain advantage over others in the ongoing battle to secure advantageous positions in the power relations of the school. Since it was an easy way to make others feel excluded, it was resorted to by those most committed to gaining advantage in the power relations structure of the school. The feelings of some black learners are summed up in the following words:

Some white learners still live in those days of the apartheid era. They do not fit in with other learners because they still think that they are better than the others and Afrikaans must be the only language spoken at school.

In his research, Jansen (2004) drew attention to the hardened and unyielding racist attitudes of many black and white learners who seem determined to recreate the worst interactional excesses of the apartheid era which had officially ended even before they were born. These learners were being “loyal” – not to their own considered feelings and conclusions – but to a tradition of racist hatred that had been established long before they were born and that was nurtured and enlivened by the recollected experiences of the suffering under the apartheid regime of their parents, their

families and others in their communities. The other challenge that compromised the possibility of healthy interactions was knowledge that some of the learners, (coloureds) were members of gangs and that this constituted a distinct threat to their safety and even their lives, should they put a foot wrong. White, Indian and black learners were understandably afraid of any learner who had gang connections. As one learner noted:

The coloured learners from “Eesterus” (a place where the majority of people are coloureds) are gangsters and we are afraid of them because they sell drugs around the school. They are also bullies. We do not communicate with them because they say it’s either you join them or play away from them.

Video footage also shows distinctive interaction amongst learners. Learners from grade 9 and 10, they are more accommodative of one another, and turn to communicate and interact with one another. Their older counterparts’ grade 10 and 11 are ethnically close to one another but distant from one another by race. They tend to interact more from the same racial groups. The boys are more aggressive and confrontational in their behaviour with one another across the racial lines. They are careful not to be physically abusive towards one another, although they may be so verbally.

The female learners tend to interact and communicate more across racial lines. They are more accommodating of one another compared to boys. A more encouraging aspect of this research was the fact that the majority of the learners in the sample (namely, 7 out of 12) regarded the possibilities of interacting across racial and cultural barriers in a racially and ethnically mixed school as a distinct advantage because, as they said, it gave them opportunities to get to know people from different cultures and their languages, and, in the process, to enjoy opportunities for making friends across racial lines and learning to get along with one another. One learner remarked: “When we leave school we are going to interact with people from different races.” This learner felt that being able to mix in a racially and ethnically diverse school would give them an advantage over those learners who had attended schools that are not mixed in this way.

5.11 Conclusion

Communicative interactions between teachers and learners and among learners themselves and desegregated classrooms depend on the attitudes of both teachers and learners. While positive expectations influence learners to be open and interactive in class, the opposite is also true. It is clear from the findings of this case study that there are teachers in kind of school in which this case study was conducted who do not accept the presence of learners from other racial and ethnic groups and who feel that it is not acceptable to make their feelings known to the racially diverse learners they encounter in their classrooms. These teachers have made it clear that they do not want to change, even though it is their duty to provide equal and fair opportunities for the advancement of all the learners entrusted to their care.

But there are also some teachers who consciously and make special efforts to accommodate the diversity of the racially different learners they are required to teach. It is also noticeable that learner-to-learner interactions are influenced by their individual and personal attitudes towards one another and the question who will gain the ascendancy in the power struggle that occurs in the classroom. It was also clear that schools subscribe to the policy of assimilation when they have to accommodate diversity among learners. In the school in which I conducted the case study, Afrikaans culture happened to be the historically established culture of the school. While some of the learners from other races did not feel that they were recognised as an integral part of the school, they were however still expected to adapt their behaviour to fit in with the long-established Afrikaans-based customs and traditions of the school. As I listened to them narrating their stories, I realised that most previously white South African schools still have a long way before racially and ethnically diverse learners are integrated into their schools and classrooms. Or will it be more accurate to describe the future of our education system in the following words that were used by one of the teachers who said: “I do not think that there will ever be true integration amongst learners from different racial groups [just] as much as there are teachers who are not supposed to be teachers.”

CHAPTER 6

THE DESTINATION

6.1. Introduction

In chapter 5, the research findings were presented in the form of a case study. The findings were then subjected to a qualitative analysis in an attempt to identify the common themes and trends that appeared in the case study. In this final chapter, the themes and findings that emerged from the analysis are drawn together into a discussion, various conclusions are suggested, and recommendations are made for possible further research. This chapter also contains reflections on the main issues that were evident in communications between teachers and learners, and among the learners themselves as they interacted with one another in a desegregated classroom. The findings set out in chapter 5 demonstrate that there are challenges that both teachers and learners face in their interactions with one another in desegregated classrooms. It has also been demonstrated that the manner and style of communication and interaction between teachers and learners correlates strongly with their attitudes towards one another. The aim of this study was to examine and describe the nature of the communications and interactions among the learners themselves and between the teachers and learners in desegregated classrooms in South Africa. The following have been identified as the major themes in this study: race discourse, colour-blindness, assimilation, style of teaching, verbal and non-verbal communication, and teacher-learner and learner-learner interaction. The conclusions presented below are followed by recommendations for possible future research and study.

6.2. Race discourse of invasion

The race discourse of invasion is about teachers and learners and learners and learners as they communicate and interact with one other and invade each other's spaces.

6.2.1. Is it racism or something else...?

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that the communicative interactions described were influenced by the teachers' and learners' respective awareness of their diverse backgrounds and racial identities. Data collected during the course of the case study also provided evidence that racism was being practised at all levels of the school's organisation: by individuals, groups, and

by the institution itself. One example of collective or group racism was evident from the fact that while white teachers and learners prohibited learners from various black racial groups from speaking in their mother tongues, they however made no similar prohibition with regard to Afrikaans learners. They knowingly permitted white, Afrikaans-speaking learners to speak in Afrikaans (their mother tongue).

There was also evidence in the data of the inherent racism that resides in the denial of racism. Thus, for example, in those cases where teachers and learners directly or indirectly deny the existence of racism, they are either consciously or unconsciously practising a subtle form of racism. An example of *conscious* racism is when a teacher, for example, tells black learners that he or she does not like them because they are “lazy”. An example of *unconscious* racism is when a teacher, whose English-language skills are poor, coaches an Afrikaans-speaking learner in Afrikaans while ignoring all the other learners who also need attention. The majority of white teachers and learners still strongly believe that learners from other racial groups are “invading” their school, and such beliefs as this exert a powerful negative influence on the methods and styles they use to interact with learners from other ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Although desegregation has been implemented in South African schools, and schooling has technically been deracialised, racism continues to appear in different guises and at different levels throughout the schooling system. The following diagram (Figure 6.1 below) depicts the way in which individual, group and institutional racism flows throughout the system to manifest itself in South African schools.

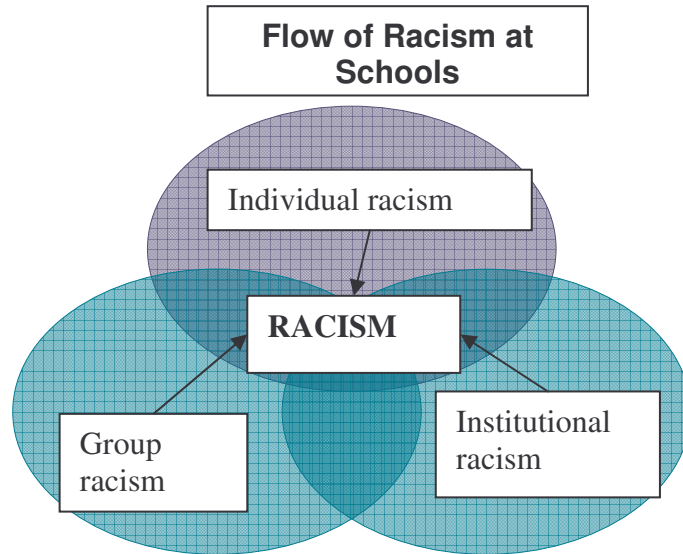


Figure 6.1
Presence of racism at South African schools

The directions in which racism flows from individuals, groups and institutions strengthen and reinforce the racism that is prevalent in South African schools.

This diagram shows that although many different kinds of racism exist and that they emanate from many different quarters of the educational system, they all nevertheless contribute to the overall presence of the kind of racism that is described in this research. The researcher also deduced from which arguments that some teachers and learners advanced to justify their racism that they were actually afraid to acknowledge that racism did indeed exist in their school. Although they preferred to be in denying this racism, they nevertheless acknowledged the necessity for change and transformation of their attitudes towards racism. While the pace of transformation for many white teachers and learners is slow, sufficient evidence exists; however that transformation is indeed taking place, even though it is still in its early stages.

The data also showed that some white learners were establishing bonds of friendship with learners from other racial and ethnic groups. I interpreted this as an indication that at least some learners were engaged in closing the gap between the various racial groups and in lessening the amount of overall resistance to transformation that is present in the education sector. Although many of these friendships appeared to be superficial or even tentative, the fact that there was some effort to bridge racial differences and to tolerate and accommodate one another was interpreted as a positive step towards transformation.

Although some of the Afrikaans teachers encountered in the study were still resistant to any change of attitude, even they seem to be strongly aware that change needed to happen. And although some teachers were open to progressive changes, they did not know how to interact with learners from different racial backgrounds. In order to cope with the situation, they tended to ignore all racial differences, even though they were aware that many of the learners they were teaching were from backgrounds different from their own. While this behaviour of these teachers may be understood as a form of coping behaviour, it was not what the black learners needed. Because of the inferior educational experiences to which nearly all blacks have been exposed in segregated schools, they are in fact in urgent need of special remedial tuition and attention that will enable them to compensate for the deficiencies in their educational backgrounds.

It is inevitable therefore that many teachers will spend more time helping black learners to gain the knowledge they need to operate on the educational levels at which they find themselves. The data show that when white learners observe this process at work, they use it a reason for identifying themselves as victims of racism and as both helpless and powerless; they then, consequently, become angry with black learners whom they regard as being the cause of what they regard as a kind of discrimination that is deliberately directed against them. Because they do not understand the reasons why black learners need special remedial attention, many white learners regard themselves as the victims of reverse racism, when they themselves do not receive this attention.

The data show that learners have many different expectations of the way in which necessary changes should be implemented. While many white learners are trying to prevent themselves from being disadvantaged, most black learners simply require that the educational environment treat

them fairly and that the authorities take cognisance of their special needs. This requirement is interpreted by some white learners as “favouritism” or as an unfair advantage that has its roots in the political hegemony of a non-racist government. The many white learners who actively resist the educational changes that are occurring incrementally all over South Africa find themselves in an unenviable position of diminishing returns. The reality is that they cannot separate themselves from African learners in government-sponsored educational institutions, and they have to begin to accept them because this is a situation that cannot simply be wished away. Black learners are, and will remain, a permanent part of the educational establishment in South Africa.

While the data reveal that they are aware that they need to change, many learners nevertheless play on the willingness of some teachers to excuse them from working and interacting with learners from other racial and ethnic backgrounds, and to authorise them to work alone – away from any creative contact with learners from other racial backgrounds. Black learners, on the other hand, tend to speak in their mother tongue in their discussions with one another and with the teacher (where applicable) so that they cannot be understood. They justify this behaviour on the grounds that they themselves are being discriminated against by the “system”. This kind of suspicion, mistrust and disappointment results in a breakdown in communication and hardens attitudes on both sides of the racial divide. In practice, this means that learners in classrooms become divided in terms of their race and ethnic group.

The divisions and hostility that one encounters are not predicated on race alone. The data show that the tendency of learners to isolate themselves is also based on ethnicity. Among Blacks, cultural differences between Sotho, Zulu and Ndebele, for example, can cause the same tensions that frequently occur between whites and blacks. Observation during the research showed that the black learners in the sample contended with one another for supremacy in the classroom. My own interpretation of this behaviour is that because some learners feel inadequate and dissatisfied with the opportunities for interaction that present themselves at school, they compete with one another for positions of social dominance in order to prove to themselves and others that their group is “superior” to other groups in the classroom. Their behaviour could therefore be explained in terms of the insecurity that many learners feel in their communication and interaction with one another.

In spite of evidence of racism in the school, there were indeed some teachers and learners who were making the effort to undermine the dominance of the racist paradigm by accommodating one another in both work and in extracurricular contacts.

When learners noticed that some teachers were indeed making the effort to include *all* learners in whatever activities were necessary to master the curriculum, they warmed to these individuals and felt much more comfortable with them. Teachers who were observed by their learners to respect the mother tongues of each individual racial and ethnic group earned respect and even affection from the learners whom they instructed. This, of course, represents the ideal to which all non-racist educationists aspire: equal treatment and non-biased attention to the individual and collective needs of all learners. Teachers, who were successful in creating an atmosphere of equality and compassionate concern for all the learners in their classrooms, were frequently observed to make use of collaborative learning techniques because collaborative learning fosters non-racist interactions among learners and therefore strengthens the process of deracialisation.

Although there were some teachers in the participating sample that remained resistant to accepting learners from diverse racial backgrounds, they themselves were aware that they would somehow, in some way, have to change their behaviour towards learners from different backgrounds if they have to remain useful and productive members of their profession in South Africa. Unfortunately, however, the pace at which they were observed to be changing was very slow. The traditional methods that the authorities in the school employed also contributed to slowing down progress towards interaction. It was observed, for example, that while they were not always meticulous about affirming the multicultural nature of the school's learners, they did, by implication at least, assert the dominance of white learners over the other learners in the school (and, by extension, the inferiority of those other learners who were not white). This was evident in one of the cultural events that was organised by the school. A team of white learners was asked to organise an evening of poetry readings. Because no black, Indian or coloured learner had been invited to participate in the function, it created the impression that the school authorities did not trust or believe that black or other learners were capable of meaningfully participating in such in an event.

What is evident from all these examples is that the official desegregation and deracialisation of a school does not necessarily result in integration. The racial differences amongst teachers and learners do not mean that one racial group is superior or inferior to any other group in a school. It just means that they are different. Racism might still remain entrenched in the power relations that prevail and in the inequality that one sees in the interactions that occur among members of different racial groups.

6.3. Colour-blindness: does it function as a smokescreen for racism?

It must be conceded that both the teachers and the learners in the case study were aware that change needs to happen. This awareness was confirmed by the reiterated contention of both teachers and learners that they were unaware of the colour of the people with whom they came into contact in the school. They also reiterated that “all human beings are the same except for the colour of their skin”. It is my contention that these teachers and learners practice a subtle form of racism when they make such statements because they are suppressing the negative images that they entertain of other racial groups when they profess to be completely unaware of racial differences such as colour. Such attitudes and assertions have important implications for interactions.

If human beings fail to confront the negative images and beliefs they hold about one another so that they can better cope with emotions that such perceptions engender, then one might argue that such suppression of negative feelings reinforces (rather than diminishes) communication barriers. It was my observation that when either teachers or learners failed to acknowledge their shortcomings, they effectively excluded themselves from the cultural advantages, the wealth of knowledge, the expansion of sympathies and the enrichment of relationships that a truly non-racist attitude towards others is able to engender. It appears that, a truly non-racist environment in education enriches and advances the practice and development of the curriculum in all classroom situations.

The data confirmed that a relationship exists between those who deny any awareness of colour and racial difference of members of different races, and their degree of resistance to change. The obverse is also true: true non-racism arises out of a willingness of learners and teachers to

acknowledge in a respectful way the differences between races and ethnic groups. The next step in establishing non-racism involves knowing how to deal with race-based differences. In the case of white teachers and learners, they need to understand that they share a similar cultural and social frame of reference which is different from that shared by other learners, and that it is thus easier and more comfortable for them to interact with one another because of this common frame of reference.

In addition to this, teachers and learners from different racial backgrounds need to acknowledge that they need to make, additional efforts to understand one another and to appreciate the differences that they encounter when making such efforts. All teachers and learners therefore need to ask themselves the following questions: (1) what are the best ways of interacting with teachers and learners who are from racial and ethnic backgrounds that are different from their own? (2) What *efforts* do they need to make so that they interact with one another in such a way that those from another racial group will not feel rejected?

When teachers and learners claim they do not see the colour of someone who belongs to another racial group, this creates a barrier between them. The barriers indicate their inability to communicate effectively and sympathetically with one another because their attitudes are already predetermined by the false conviction that “all people are the same”. The same is true of learners who come from racial backgrounds that are different from those of other learners. They too are excluded from effective communication and interaction because of maintaining their colour blindness. It has already been noted above that both teachers and learners need to acknowledge their differences before they can begin to understand one another. By failing to recognise and acknowledge racial differences, teachers and learners make themselves vulnerable to racism. This happens because those who deny differences neglect to make the efforts that are required to overcome racism. What need is there for an effort, when no problem of racism actually exists?

This denial creates impermeable barriers in communication and undermines the teacher and learners’ ability to re-educate themselves so that they become effective non-racist instructors and learners. The ideal state to which all teachers and learners should be aspiring is the state of neutrality and accommodation. Once this state has been achieved, both teachers and learners are

able to rise above their negative attitudes towards members of other races. The affirmation of differences does not imply that some human beings are superior to others; it only means that all human beings are different.

6.4. Assimilation: are we all the same?

Once learners from diverse classrooms had been received into the school, the intention of the school authorities was to create an educational environment which was non-racist and accommodating of differences. But since the majority of the black, Indian and coloured learners who entered the school had to adapt *their* behaviour while none of the white learners were required to make any changes whatsoever; one may conclude that white learners were the only group who were in fact being accommodated. It was noticeable, for example, that the school environment and its predominant ethos and values remained unchanged for white learners. An equal effort is required, however, from both those learners who are already securely established in their own cultural milieu in a school, and those who enter to what is to them a demanding context whose requirements they find difficult to fulfil. But when both those who are already established in the school environment (the white learners) and those who enter it from the outside (learners from other racial and ethnic groups) make an equal effort to accommodate the presence and the difficulties of the newcomers, it is conceivable that a synergy would emerge that will be to the advantage of all racial and ethnic groups and to the institution as a whole.

Unfortunately there seem to be many schools in South Africa that have not made the necessary effort to accommodate learners from racial groups other than their own traditional white constituency. This is unacceptable among learners who cannot fit in because they feel alienated, rejected, and inferior. It should also be noted that teachers are in a crucial position to affect the course of assimilation. Those teachers, who make the effort required to accommodate learners from other racial and ethnic groups by fully and wholeheartedly endorsing an assimilationist position in practice and in rhetoric, create the necessary foundation for a harmonious, non-racist education environment. By contrast, those teachers who oppose assimilation undermine the necessary conditions for non-racism in education.

Figure 6.2 (below) indicates the direction of the confrontation (for better or for worse) that occurs in all South African schools that attempt to create a non-racist environment

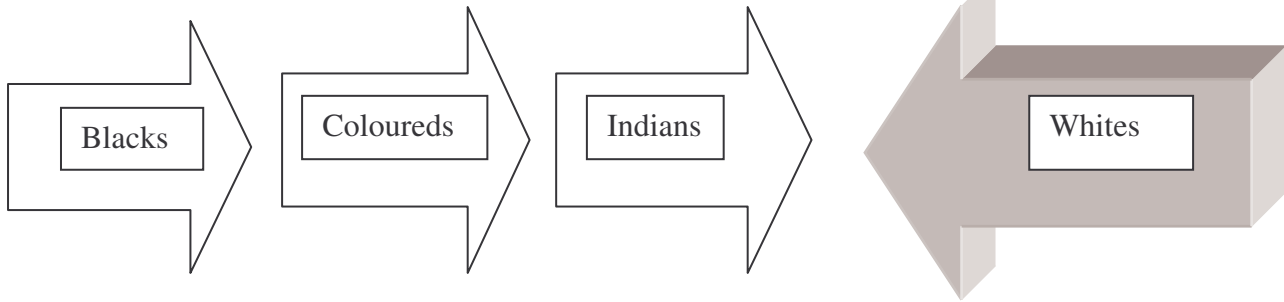


Figure 6.2. A diagrammatic representation of the potential for conflict when learners from other racial and ethnic groups are accommodated in schools that were designed only for white learners.

The smaller arrows represent the blacks, coloured and Indian learners as they enter a previously whites-only school (such as an ex-Model C school) and begin to interact and communicate with existing white learners (represented by the large grey arrow). The size of the grey arrow in comparison to the smaller white arrows indicates the size and force of the resistance that learners from other racial and ethnic groups can expect from the established procedures and precedents of the school as it existed under of the pre-1994 racist educational philosophy. The shock to the established school system with its entrenched philosophy, values, culture and the dominance of its own language as a medium of instruction should not be underestimated. (In the case study on which this research is based, the language of instruction and cultural values of the school were Afrikaans.)

It is important to note that the grey arrow has sufficient strength and momentum to “swallow” the other three arrows because it represents the accumulated cultural and linguistic energy of centuries of racial domination and also because the school in which this case study was conducted was staffed by teachers who were similarly saturated in the traditions and conventions of their own racial and cultural group (in this case, those of the Afrikaners of South Africa). While one cannot deny the shock that an invasion of culturally and racially “alien” entrants exerts on the stability of an established system such as that of a school, one should also acknowledge that the onus lies on the long-term residents to welcome the newcomers. This does not invalidate my previous assertion that it requires an *equal* effort from all concerned (everyone represented by the arrows) to create a harmonious and non-racist educational environment.

When teachers and learners express racism in thought, words and action, this isolates white learners from learners of other racial groups and causes division and barriers to effective and sympathetic communication. It cannot be denied that the words, behaviour and attitudes of some teachers and learners express the false proposition that “the school belongs to them”. Learners from other racial groups then feel inadequate, confused and resentful. They also begin to feel that they are “not good enough” for the school, and begin to imagine that they had been accepted into the school only as a favour. The “sharing” of education is however not a favour, but part of the fundamental justice and equity of the new non-racist order in South Africa. After centuries of discrimination, it is as much the right of one group as it is of any other to enjoy the best quality education that the state can afford. This right is enshrined in the statutory laws of our country. The South African School Act of 1996 (SASA) endorses “an open door” policy to all learners, irrespective of the racial and ethnic group to which they belong.

6.5. Style of teaching and class participation

The style of teaching that learners encounter influences the way in which they participate in the classroom, and the ways in which teachers and learners interact with one another also contribute to the degree and quality of learner participation in the classroom. The data that was collected for this study make it clear that it is the attitudes of the teachers themselves that create an environment that is either conducive to communication and interaction – or not. Footage from the video observations, for example, reveal that some of the teachers who were aloof and overly strict, tended to create an environment in which learners were passive and quiet and in which they participated far less frequently in classroom interactions. The video record also confirmed the contrary case, namely, that those teachers who were more demonstrative in their manner and who were unafraid of harnessing the power of emotions in their teaching style, tended to create an environment in which learners felt free to reveal more of themselves and to participate more actively in classroom interactions.

There were some teachers in the sample whose attitude towards the learners in the classroom setting was characterised by aloofness and emotional unavailability. The video record shows that there was little or no interaction between these teachers and their learners in the classroom. In most cases, the teaching style of these teachers was to stand in front of the classroom and to read

to the learners. While they were doing this, they clearly did not either expect or solicit contributions or participation from the learners. The video recording reveals quite clearly how the learners reacted to teachers of this kind: they remained quiet, passive and subdued, and interacted very little or not at all with the teacher concerned or with one another. These learners were being treated according to the paradigm of conventional teaching. In other words, they were largely regarded by such teachers as “empty vessels” into which information needed to be poured. It was clear that such teachers had no idea that the learners were able to construct their own meanings and contribute towards their own learning. All that they were expected to do was to sit passively, listen attentively, and acquire the information that was being imparted to them.

Such conditions are profoundly inimical to learner involvement in the construction of their own meanings and the active acquisition of their own knowledge. The prevalence of such conditions is not conducive to learning in the sense as described above. It is apparent that what these aloof teachers most valued were silence, passivity and obedience among the learners. No doubt, the teachers who utilised this method regarded the silence and passivity of the learners in the classroom as a justifiable form of educational “discipline” – the kind of discipline they considered a necessary prelude to any kind of effective learning and teaching. Because no noise, activity or interaction occurred in the classrooms, teachers were unaware of any barrier between themselves and any particular group of learners. In such circumstances, interactions among pupils who had not been specifically “authorised” by the teacher himself/herself would be regarded as an incipient indication of poor discipline – or even a disciplinary problem – on the part of the pupil(s) concerned. The contrary is in fact the case.

The video record also makes it clear that some teachers tended to direct their teaching interactions and interventions toward one particular racial group of learners alone – in this case, those who were white. These white teachers focused their attention on white learners alone to the exclusion of other racial and ethnic groups. They offered white learners much more individual attention. As a result of this, the white learners participated to a far greater degree in classroom transactions. It was also observed that these learners were far more active in supplying answers to questions that the teacher posed to the class as a whole. Even when learners from other racial groups raised their

hands and tried to attract the attention of the teacher in these circumstances, the teacher ignored them.

It may be concluded that these teachers were resisting systemic change by excluding learners from different racial groups from their interactions and by marginalising all learners who were not white. By demonstrating such resistance in the public forum of the classroom, these teachers deliberately selected learners from other racial groups as victims for discrimination, even though they manifested such discrimination indirectly by means of passive aggression rather than actively and directly.

The data obtained from the research also indicated that some teachers are irritated when they are interrupted in their discourse by inquiries or remarks from learners. The data reveal that these teachers became irritated with the learners concerned, and that some even resorted to making abusive remarks to those learners who interrupted them – even when such interruptions might have assisted the whole class better to understand the point(s) that the teacher was attempting to convey. Such negative characterisations and public humiliations damage the self-esteem of any learner, no matter how psychologically robust he or she may be. The result of such forms of humiliation and abuse is that the learners quickly learn to remain silent and never to ask any questions, even when such questions might be essential for their proper understanding of the content that the teacher is trying to convey. Learners in a classroom situation quickly learn how to decipher the non-verbal codes of behaviour in terms of which a particular teacher regulates behaviour in class.

This research also revealed that there are some teachers and learners who impose an essentially racist paradigm on classroom interactions and activities. This paradigm is reinforced by humiliation and punishment of those learners who try to resist it and create a more learner-friendly atmosphere in which all learners are treated equally. Those teachers and learners who enforce a racist paradigm and impose it on others in their school are in denial about the fact that they are discriminating against learners from different racial backgrounds.

Those teachers, who made attempt to give equal attention to learners of all racial groups, obtained completely different results. When these teachers spread their attention evenly among all the learners, everyone in their classrooms was observed to benefit to an equal extent from the attention and recognition provided by the teacher. All the learners under who were taught by these teachers were able to develop a sense of belonging to the group and were able to identify with what each of the more progressive teachers was trying to convey. The video recording of a case study reveals that learners in such circumstances were given opportunities to develop confidence in themselves. The just and equal treatment provided by the teacher reassured them that the teachers were “on their side”, and so they felt neither alienated, discriminated nor marginalised.

The data collected during the course of a case study also show how some teachers actively encouraged all learners to participate in their classrooms through their personal teaching style of sympathetic engagement, encouragement and respect for the individuality and status of each learner. The data also show how teachers who were more demonstrative and attempted to include all the learners in their classroom, sometimes even attempted to convey information by speaking, to whatever extent they could, in a mother tongue language that was not the medium of instruction. So great is the power of such simple symbolic acts that the learners who were targeted for this kind of affirmative symbolic action responded by becoming even more open to the teacher. The overall effect on the learners was that they *all* felt more accepted and affirmed – in spite of their racial and ethnic identities and the racist attitudes that were embedded in the historical identity of the school.

There is an existing body of research that demonstrates that when teachers give learners the opportunity to see that they are positively disposed towards them, such learners respond by becoming much more active and enthusiastic in their classroom interactions. But whenever learners are abused and marginalised (for example, ignoring a learner who is clamouring for attention), then such learners quickly become less confident in the classroom, and they begin to feel intimidated, unwanted, and unwelcome in the class. As a result of this they invariably begin to interact, and communicate less (if at all) because they fear the kind of rejection that has already been demonstrated by the teacher.

All these factors cause a breakdown in communication and interaction because the power relations in the classroom have been defined as unequal by the teaching style of the teacher. It has already been mentioned above that the data clearly indicate that the way in which teachers interact with learners in their classrooms influences their ability to communicate with all their learners as well as the ability of the learners to interact with one another.

Some teachers argue that levels of participation in the classroom remain as they have always been because the learners already know one another well and because they have been together for a long time throughout their school careers. The problem with this kind of argument is that it ignores the fact that teachers are able to exert a uniquely powerful influence on the actual modes of interaction that occur in classrooms, whether such interactions are between learner and teacher or among the learners themselves. Those teachers who have a sympathetic understanding of the language, values and culture of all their pupils, are able to elicit progressive forms of behaviour, even among those learners who had demonstrated a record of supporting the traditional racist paradigms of the whites-only schools of the apartheid era. When the majority of these teachers are white (as they often are in these schools), there is an implicit understanding between such teachers and white learners, and there are no cultural, social or linguistic barriers that impede ease of communication and understanding. But when the learners for whom the teachers are responsible present a frame of references that is radically different from that of the teacher, then even teachers who display equity and fairness in the distribution of their attention and help, need to proceed cautiously.

Differences in background, culture, values and language create special difficulties, not only for teachers, but for learners as well. All teachers in classes that are in the process of becoming deracialised need to be consciously aware that their own personal programming can affect the effectiveness of the power relations that prevail in the classroom. Human beings either consciously or unconsciously endorse whatever beliefs or value systems that coincide with their own. But for teachers who have inherited all the problems that are associated with a racist system of education in transition, there is need for special caution and self-awareness. While it is important that a teacher should do everything in to facilitate the learners' understanding and grasp of the subject content, it is also important to create a solid foundation for the furtherance of harmonious racial

relations between groups who had been scarred by a long history of apartheid. The accumulated data clearly show that the equality and equity of learner participation in any particular classroom depend on the extent of the sympathy and fairness that obtains, in the relationship between teachers and learners in a multiracial, multi-ethnic classroom.

It was clear to the researcher and her collaborators that some of the teachers and learners were in the process of moving towards one another and accepting and accommodating one another in an harmoniously integrated racial setting – while they were still able to acknowledge their differences. The data also showed that learners and teachers who worked together without racist animus or prejudice were quite capable of accepting one another’s respective cultures and of learning lessons from their obvious differences.

But those learners who had set their minds against accepting of other race and ethnic groups were capable of sabotaging the atmosphere that the generous and warm-hearted teachers were attempting to create. It was observed that those learners who predicated their identity on racism were active in competing aggressively for domination of the classroom with members of other race and ethnic groups. One of the means that these learners used to impede and subvert change for example, was the projection of their own mother tongue as the dominant language of discourse and communication in the classroom. It was observed, for example, that some white learners habitually spoke only Afrikaans in the classroom even though they were fully aware that the African and Indian learners could not understand them. It was also observed that black learners frequently competed with other blacks on the basis of the ethnicity of those other learners. Sotho learners would therefore set themselves against Ndebele or Zulu learners (and vice versa) during participation exercises in the classroom, with the intention of placing themselves in a position of dominance in the prevailing power relations. These learners were also observed to treat one another as rivals as they competed for the attention of the teachers.

There are always a percentage of learners in any class who do not interact (or who only interact under duress) with other learners because of past experiences that have damaged their self-esteem and perception of their unique value and dignity as individual human beings. The data suggest that these learners are convinced that they are “not good enough” and of little value compared to other

human beings. Because of this, they fear being ridiculed, humiliated and bullied by other learners. Learners who perceive themselves negatively and as being worthless, useless and of no value to anyone at all, all suffer from a painful lack of proper self-esteem, which is the result of past practices that have been inflicted on the integrity, self-image and personalities. Since they operate from a basis of low self-esteem, such learners often tend to be “difficult learners” (despite that many of them possessing exceptional talents and capabilities that have never been exploited). Such learners are also deficient in the skills of interacting with other learners, and it requires a great deal of long-term patience, kindness and encouragement on the part of their teachers to help them to learn to take their rightful place in the classroom. Such learners have been observed to interact far less frequently with other learners, whether in the classroom or in social situations.

An efficient teacher is someone who is able to adapt his/her modes of interaction to suit the particular needs and difficulties of the learners for whom he/she is responsible. A skilled teacher is also able to regulate the flow of interactions among the learners in the classroom, without dampening the spirits of those who are most vocal, keen and enthusiastic, and without ignoring the special sensitivity with which one needs to deal with those learners who have been injured in their self-esteem by their circumstances and their personal and collective history. Communication and interaction is enhanced by consistency on the part of the teacher. All learners need to understand (without “testing” the teacher concerned) that they are equally valued, appreciated and accepted for themselves, and just as they are. The traditional virtues of kindness, respect and sensitivity to the needs and hurts of others therefore constitute the basis of all effective teaching because it is only by exercising such virtues that a teacher will be able to create a unity of purpose and mutual respect in the classroom.

6.6. Verbal and non-verbal communication

Problems of communication both verbally and non-verbally often arise between teachers and learners in the current educational context because both the teacher and the learners operate according to different frames of references. One of the most powerful forms of communication between human beings is non-verbal. An obvious example of non-verbal communication is body language and facial expression, by means of which human beings can convey the whole spectrum of human emotions without uttering a single word.

Teachers who are out of touch with their learners may be astonished to be told that they frequently express aggression, anger, hostility and a lack of proper respect and sympathy towards their learners. What they might not realise is that they are expressing all these negative emotions by means of various forms of non-verbal body language and subtle facial expressions. The human face is capable of conveying an extraordinary variety of non-verbal information.

Many of the most senior teachers in white South African schools are themselves white, and they were trained during the heyday of the apartheid era. None of these teachers was trained to cope with multiracial classes in which the learners come from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. It is understandable therefore that, even with the best will in the world, a great deal of hostility is sometimes generated as such teachers attempt to cope with the racial and ethnic diversity that they encounter among their learners.

Between 1948 and 1994, all teachers who were trained in South African teachers' training colleges and universities were compelled by law to conform to an educational philosophy that was squarely based on the ideological premises of apartheid education and the more comprehensive political philosophy of apartheid that informed the actions of the National Party government that remained in power until 1994. This philosophy of education was based on the premise that all members of any race or ethnic group that was not "white" (as defined by the government), was inferior to white South Africans. In order therefore to avoid "contamination" by these "inferior" members of South African society, white learners and students were carefully segregated from all other races and ethnic groups – even though they were all members of the same society, and had always been so. Segregation was most rigidly applied in every form of education from nursery schools to universities, and this exclusion admitted of no exceptions. Even teacher training colleges and universities were segregated, and a great deal of taxpayers' money was expended during these years on establishing separate teacher training colleges and universities for members of different races and ethnic groups. South Africa is still left with the legacy of the various black universities, Indian universities, Coloured universities, and white universities that were built at this time.

The fallout from this legacy of institutionalised apartheid is that there are now many white – mainly older – teachers in South African schools who find that their classes are no longer composed only of white students, but of learners from many different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Because of the many differences between the ethnic and racial groups in South Africa, and because most black learners come from schools in which they were given an inferior education that ill-prepared them for further learning, these apartheid-trained teachers now find themselves confronted by a wide range of human relations problems that admit of no easy solution. The kind of education that these teachers offer to their pupils was originally designed to accommodate only white learners who, under the apartheid regime, had been the beneficiaries of the very best that the segregated South African education system could offer.

Apart from the problems caused by the ingrained racist conditioning of many (but not all) apartheid-trained teachers, they now find that they also have to cope with the educational deficits among for learners and students who received an inferior education in racially segregated schools during the apartheid era. These teachers tend to endorse the beliefs, attitudes, values and curricula standards that were designed for the white learners who had previously been educated in segregated schools. Because these white teachers set the standards, norms and values of their schools, they exert a crucial influence on the way in which communication takes place between teachers and learners and among the learners themselves in the racially and ethnically diverse schools of post-apartheid South Africa.

It has been observed that there are some teachers in schools who abandon English as a medium of instruction and resort to Afrikaans, primarily because they themselves struggle to communicate effectively in English. But by resorting to the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, they effectively cut themselves off from those learners in the classrooms who do not understand Afrikaans. The result of this is that learners who are not white continue to receive the kind of inferior and second-rate education that learners who were not white received in the apartheid state.

The learners who participated in the study expressed different opinions on the quality of interactions between teachers and learners from different racial and ethnic groups in their school. The majority of learners from racial groups that were not white agreed that when they utilised

different forms of non-verbal communication, their teachers misinterpreted their actions and that these misinterpretations engendered conflict, misunderstandings and hostility. There was general agreement among learners who had experienced such conflicts, misunderstandings and hostility that namely these were caused by the fact that teachers and learners came from different cultural backgrounds. Whatever the causes, such experiences precipitated serious breakdowns in communication and also undermined the kind of trust and respect that should prevail between teacher and learners and between learners. Other data from the research showed that when white learners used to various forms of non-verbal communication, there was no dissonance or lack of understanding between them and their white teachers. Both these sets of observations reinforce the assertion that an inability to communicate effectively is bound to arise more often when two communicators come from different cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds.

6.7. Teacher-learner and learner-learner interaction

The personality of the teacher contributes to the effectiveness (or not) of communication and interaction in the classroom. Some teachers have a greater gift for communication than others, or else they have been better trained in the art or skills of communication. In any event, some of the teachers in the study expressed satisfaction with the quality of their interactions with their learners. Others expressed themselves as being satisfied, but qualified their expressions of satisfaction with the observation that respective differences in the circumstances and backgrounds of teachers and learners sometimes made effective communication difficult and problematic. One teacher, for example, admitted that it was very difficult for him to interact with learners who came from a cultural background that was different from his own. He explained the difficulty by saying that he always had to review his words and actions mentally in advance so that what he said or did would not cause unnecessary conflict. Other teachers explained that they had to modify their vocabulary and methods of expressing themselves so that they would be able to communicate effectively with learners from diverse backgrounds.

It was observed that some teachers did not interact with learners on any topic that was not *directly* related to the curriculum or the business of the school. These teachers refrain from communication on all topics other than those that are part of the curriculum and therefore the work of the school. By distancing themselves from their learners, such teachers were on a kind of passive-aggressive

strike against conditions that they could not change. They were working (in the phrase used by trade union movements) “according to the rule” or “by the book”. By doing this, they could not be officially faulted for neglecting their work. The consequence, however, of such an attitude towards learners is that the learners themselves are never in a position to benefit from the “added-on” value that good teachers make available to learners when they enrich the bare bones of the curriculum with all the richness and variety of their personal experience, wisdom and knowledge.

Because teachers tend to be resistant to change, they sometimes express their dissatisfaction and disagreement by giving as little of themselves as they can without actually exposing themselves to possible complaints from the parents of the learners or the management of the school. This kind of behaviour constitutes a passive-aggressive form of racism. Although such behaviour might give the teacher concerned some degree of satisfaction, he/she actually undermines the highest ideals of the teaching profession by refusing to engage in a generous way with the learners who are committed to his/her care.

The best kind of teaching not comprise merely of the teaching facts, techniques and skills. That can be more efficiently conveyed by computers and educational software. The best teachers throughout the ages have been most valued, remembered and appreciated because they have all had the ability to inspire and encourage their pupils by the force and inspiration of their personalities. Of course, not all teachers can rise to such heights. But all teachers have something unique to offer, and the best teachers make themselves available for the enrichment and inspiration of their learners, irrespective of the subject they are teaching.

The data also show that some white teachers openly practise favouritism and adopt particular white pupils as “favourites” in the multiracial, multi-ethnic environment of their classrooms. Learners from other racial groups claim that this makes them feel alienated from the teacher himself/herself and from the whole ethos and atmosphere of the classroom and the subject for which the teacher is responsible. It was also observed by the researcher that learners who are “favourites” tend to interact more with the teachers, presumably because they are confident that their communications will be received well by their teachers. On the contrary, those learners who

are not favourites continue to feel alienated from the teacher, from the curriculum, and from the whole ethos of the school.

Just as favouritism is a source of bitterness in the context of family dynamics, it is also deeply resented by learners in whom it creates lasting resentment, anger and alienation. Favouritism is an indirect mechanism for giving an unfair advantage to some, and for excluding others. When favouritism is accompanied by an obvious racial bias, it perpetuates the harmful effects of racism in individuals and in society as a whole. One teacher in the participating sample tried to justify her practice of favouritism by arguing that “there will always be learners that you like and those you did not like”. The data from the research show that white teachers invariably chose white learners as favourites rather than black learners. But what of favouritism across the racial divide? What if a white teacher chose a black learner as his/her favourite? Although favouritism of this kind might not reinforce racist feelings and attitudes, favouritism in *all* circumstances, and particularly in education, is undesirable because it is a lasting source of anger and resentment to both its perpetrators and its victims.

The data show that when white teachers pick white learners as favourites, this impedes and undermines their communication with learners of other racial groups. These learners then become jealous, angry, and lose confidence in themselves, and, because of this, they become alienated from all the white learners (including the favourite) and adopt a negative attitude towards them.

On the positive side, the data provided evidence that some of the teachers and learners from the case study were able to engender and maintain a positive relationship towards one another that was based on mutual respect and trust. The learners expressed the quality of these relationships by saying that they were “open” towards certain teachers, and they compared the trust and dependency between themselves and the teacher concerned as that which prevails between a parent and child. It is notable that some of the learners expressed a feeling that they were able to trust particular teachers “with their lives”. It is evident that the quality and intensity of a relationship between a teacher and a learner – whether it is nurturing or whether it is destructive – begins, develops, and continues mainly in the context of the classroom. The data provide ample

evidence that shows that trust and respect between teacher and learner and learner and learner encourage integration and tolerance in the classroom.

6.8. Conclusion

The introduction of democratic government in South Africa in 1994 brought an end to the segregated educational system that had been systematically enforced during the previous 46 years of National Party government rule. The new government that was elected by all the racial and ethnic groups of South Africa lost little time in introducing a process of transformation of the education system and to ensuring, as far as was possible with such limited resources, equal opportunities for all South African learners. The most revolutionary feature of the new government's educational policy was the desegregation of schools in terms of the South African School Act 1996 policy (SASA).

There were many difficulties that accompanied the introduction of non-racist education in South African schools. Although the government compiled, explained and publicised their educational policy as best they could, they had to leave the implementation of the policy to the discretion and conscience of individual schools because government did not have either the financial resources or a sufficient number of qualified staff to monitor the extent to which their policy was being implemented in individual schools. This naturally created a great number of problems, as it was inevitable in such circumstances that each school would adopt its own method of putting into practice the policy of non-racism and equality and justice for all learners in education. Since every school in South Africa was obliged at least to open its doors to learners from all races, ethnic groups and religions, and because the government at the time did not have the resources to monitor and control the process of integration in schools, each school had to adopt its own strategy on how it would deal with the racial stereotyping and racial conflict that inevitably ensued among learners in some of the more racist schools. Du Toit (1995) noted in the year after the first democratic election in South Africa that simply bringing learners from diverse backgrounds together would not necessarily result in an atmosphere of trouble-free integration. He also observed that the implementation of this policy might actually set the scene for a great deal of racial conflict.

The main purpose of this study has been to describe and examine the varieties of communications and interactions that occur among learners and learners and between teachers and learners at this point in South African history. The data collected from the case study identified a number of challenges and difficulties that still hinder effective and harmonious communication and interactions between teachers and learners. The data also show the way some of these difficulties and challenges have been overcome and how, as a result, successful communications and interactions among learners in schools and between teachers and learners are being continuously enabled by, for example, the efforts and good will of individual teachers who do everything in their power to undermine the effects of the kind of racism that prevailed in South African schools since the arrival of white settlers in 1653.

The literature that was examined as a part of this study shows how some ex-Model C white schools, as well as various Indian and coloured schools adopted approaches that allow them to assimilate a certain number of black learners while at the same time denying them the necessary opportunities to express the full potential of their abilities. The data from the case study also provide a comprehensive picture of how some white teachers deliberately tried to deny accommodation to the black learners who had been admitted to their school. The words and actions of these teachers made it clear to all concerned that they would never accept a non-racist philosophy of education in their classrooms or in the extra-mural activities for which they were responsible. For them, it was “business as usual”.

The data clearly reveal that various forms of racism are being practised in schools. Manifestations of racism occur among some teachers and learners, for example, as they communicate and interact with one another, and as they adhere to the colour-blind approach to the race issue. Racism also appeared in the context of assimilation, group racism or subtle racism – all approaches that have already been discussed in detail above. But while all forms of racism exert a negative effect on both the perpetrators and victims, the more subtle forms of racism that occur in the context of interactions between white learners and learners from other racial groups, hinder the psychological and educational development of learners. And even though such forms of racism are usually oblique and passive-aggressive, they nevertheless constitute a form of discrimination

against those learners against whom they are directed. It should also be noted that they are none the less damaging because they are not openly practised.

Racism was especially observed in the conversations that took place in the classrooms. These conversations were dominated by white learners and white teachers, and the way in which they were conducted effectively silenced learners from other racial groups. Even so, the data revealed that some of the teachers and learners were indeed making persistent efforts to institute change. These efforts were visible in the way in which certain teachers consciously and deliberately tried way to accommodate and involve learners from different racial groups and involve in the general communication and interactions that took place in the classroom. As was noted above, some white teachers even tried to encourage learners from other racial groups by speaking one or two words in African languages and also by allowing learners to express themselves in their mother tongue. Other teachers made use of the latitude permitted in the curriculum to include elements of African culture in the forms of poetry, drama, and so on. These efforts which were appreciated by the black learners, and indications that non-racist white teachers are deliberately acting to affect the kind of transformation that has been envisaged by the government since 1994. While this is a slow process, the signs of change and transformation are there to be seen.

This study produced evidence that the school in which the study was conducted was beset by challenges that were the cause of communication barriers among learners and teachers. Such barriers were evident in the use of language, in the failure to accommodate cultural differences, in the dynamics of class participation, and in the use of both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication such as body language and facial expressions. Some of the learners and teachers identified these same challenges and attitudes, and those who were committed to advancing the cause of non-racism in their school used them to their advantage to negate the effects of the racist paradigm wherever they could. These teachers and learners became enablers in the cause of non-racism in their desegregated classrooms.

There are challenges that face South African schools in the context of communication and interactions in the classroom and in the extramural activity of the schools. It is also evident that the government will have to take the initiative and adopt a more proactive stance by implementing

programmes that can effectively train both staff and learners in desegregated schools if they hope to make a success of multicultural, multiracial schools in this country. What this study makes clear is that racism does not simply disappear of its own accord once schools have become officially be segregated.

Racism in South Africa has very deep cultural and historical roots, and the government will have the support specific measures and programmes that will empower people with skills to act, think and behave in non-racist ways. Such programmes will also need to train learners and teachers in a variety of methods that will be effective in confronting and neutralising the racism that occurs in the context of the school and the community. The greatest need for such programmes and empowerment is in those schools (such as the one in the case study) that have been officially desegregated. The introduction of multiculturalism and non-racism in a school that has been historically racist is by no means unproblematic. There is therefore a need to support all desegregated schools if effects of racism are not to be passed in the next generation of adults in our country.

It is noticeable that the expanding effects of globalisation and the exponential improvements that have been effected in technology in areas such as computer and information science are slowly eroding the boundaries that exist between diverse cultures on both a national and an international level. South Africa is uniquely placed to become a pioneer in breaking down the cultural and racial boundaries that separate human beings. The government's policy of desegregation in South Africa schools is providing a unique opportunity for people from different racial and cultural groups to cross these boundaries and to learn to live together in peace and harmony.

6.9. Recommendations

In this study I have identified and described the hindrances and enablers of communication and interactions between teachers and learners and among learners from different racial and cultural groups. Some conclusions and recommendations follow:

- Desegregated schools in South Africa need developmental and educative programmes that address the problems that both teachers and learners experience in desegregated classrooms.

- Schools should be empowered with the necessary skills to organise and present workshops that train both teachers and learners to be aware of the manifestations of racism in everyday life and in the school context, and to become more sensitive to the needs and dignity of people from other racial and ethnic groups through the process of empowered communication. Schools also need staffs who are skilled in the presentation of awareness workshops that will be able to sensitise teachers and learners to the differences in beliefs and cultural practices of learners from other racial and cultural groups.
- The school curriculum needs to be adapted to cater for the diverse needs, cultural practices and beliefs of all learners.
- Curriculum development in schools should ensure that learning materials are inclusive of the special interests, the sensitivities and the beliefs of all learners. Curriculum development in schools also needs to be sensitised to the adoption of teaching strategies that enhance inter-ethnic communication.
- All schools in South Africa need to commit themselves openly, officially and in practice to the adoption and support of an official anti-racist programme and an agenda that will inform all its transactions. Such an anti-racist programme will strive to deal effectively with the needs of all learners so that they will feel at home in their schools and will be able to pursue their studies without racist distractions. It is vital that every learner be given the opportunity to feeling that he or she is a valued member of the school community. Such a programme should be based on an acknowledgement of differences that exist among teachers and learners, and that such differences are important and should be respected. To pretend that there are no differences between races and ethnic groups is a form of denialism that nourishes overt and oblique forms of racism.
- It is imperative for schools who are in the process of taking in new cohorts of learners to appoint members of staff who match as far as possible the identity of the new arrivals. The appointment of members of staff from other racial and ethnic groups is essential in order to

create a balance between the composition of the learner body and the composition of the staff.

- South African schools also need to adopt the non-discriminatory language policy that is implicit in the government's South African language policy. It is imperative to harmonise the practice that prevails in all schools with the long-stated government policy that accords official recognition to the other eleven indigenous languages (apart from Afrikaans and English) that are native to South Africa.
- Teachers and learners need to be given opportunities to work out methods and strategies to improve relationships among themselves.
- All South African schools should commit themselves to creating an inclusive school culture.
- All schools need to put a mechanism in place for dealing with whatever problems, and grievances and difficulties that might possibly be experienced by ethnic minority learners.
- Schools can benefit from regular social functions that promote the intermingling of learners from different racial groups. If such events are organised, they can go a long way towards promoting non-racist interaction and communication.
- There is also a need to promote the use of African languages among learners and staff members in South African schools. The cultural and historical riches contained in our different languages in South Africa provide teachers and learners with numerous opportunities to use these languages to their advantage and to enrich themselves by using different languages to learn from one another. This creative use of the other official languages of South Africa can only be effective and affirming if those concerned do not regard them as a threat to their school or to their personal and collective identities, but as a resource that has the potential to enrich their interactions and communication with others.

- Since learners from diverse background frequently experience enormous challenges in speaking and writing English and Afrikaans effectively, there is also obviously a need to train them in the use of these languages so that they will be able to use them fluently in social and educational contexts. It should not be forgotten that many teachers in South African schools also need supplementary training in the skills and usage of English as a medium of communication.

6.10 Areas that would benefit from further research and study

While interviewing teachers and learners and recording their opinions about the communications and interactions that occur in desegregated classrooms, I realised that a valuable topic for future research would be a careful and systematic examination of the culture that prevails in specific schools and the nature and effect of the power relations that play out between teachers from diverse backgrounds in the context of this culture.

Another possibility for further study might be to explore the non-accommodative attitudes evident in encounters in some ex-Model C schools that have become desegregated. Such a study would explore the antecedents, the functions, and the discourse of exclusion by means of which individuals in such schools justify their non-accommodation of learners from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNERS

1. What language do you use when you talk to your teacher in the classroom?
2. What language do you use when you talk to your friends in the classroom?
3. Do you find it easy to interrupt your teacher and ask questions in the class? If yes, why? Or if no, why not?
4. How does your teacher interact with you? Can you give some examples of the things she says and does?
5. How easy or difficult is it for you to work in a group?
6. Did you adapt your behavior to fit into the school when you started at your current school? If yes, give examples of the changes that you have made?
7. Do you get along with other learners in the school who have a cultural background different from your own? Give reasons for your answer?
8. What do learners with a cultural background different from yours say or do at a regular basis which you find unfamiliar or strange?
9. Do you think attending a mixed school has advantages and/ or disadvantages? Give reasons for your answer?
10. Do you have friends who are of a different racial or cultural background among your fellow learners? If yes, how close are they to you? How did you become friends?
11. Do teachers treat you the same as other learners from different racial or cultural backgrounds? Explain.
12. Are you satisfied with the interaction between you and your teachers? Explain your answer?
13. Are you satisfied with the interaction between you and your fellow learners? Elaborate your answer?
14. How does verbal communication for you contribute to your interaction with your teacher in the classroom? Does it make it easier or difficult?
15. How does non verbal communication (body language) for you contribute to your interaction with your teacher in the classroom?

16. What is it in the communication with your teachers that makes you feel comfortable or uncomfortable and Why?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

1. What is the medium of instruction in your classroom?
2. Do you use any other language (at the same time) when you talk to your learners?
3. How do you feel about learners from different racial and cultural backgrounds ...admitted to your school?
4. How easy or difficult is it for you to work with learners from different racial and cultural background from yours? Explain.
5. After 1994, were there any changes in your classroom interaction with the learners?
6. Do learners from different racial and cultural background participate equally in the classroom or frequently ask questions in the classroom?
7. How do learners of mixed race group get along with one another?
8. Did you adapt your behaviour in order to accommodate learners from different racial and cultural backgrounds from your own? If yes, give examples of the changes that you have made?
9. What do learners with a cultural background different from yours regularly say or do which you find unfamiliar or strange?
10. Are you satisfied with the level of interaction with learners who are from different racial and cultural background different from yours?
11. Do you understand the learners' body language when you interact with them?
12. How does verbal communication contribute to your interaction with your learners in the classroom?
13. How does non verbal communication (body language) contribute to your interaction with your learners in the classroom?
14. What is it in communication with your learners that make you feel comfortable or uncomfortable and Why?



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**FACULTY OF EDUCATION
GROENKLOOF CAMPUS**

5 August 2008

Ms P Nesamvuni
P O Box 93729
The Orchards
PRETORIA
0201

Dear Ms Nesamvuni

TOPIC: DISSERTATION OF LIMITED SCOPE

I have pleasure in informing you that the following has been approved:

TOPIC: Communicative interactions in desegregated classrooms

SUPERVISOR: Prof S Vandeyar

CO-SUPERVISOR: -

The appropriate regulations for the requirements of dissertations of limited scope appear in the General Regulations of the University.

Shortened guidelines for the submission and technical details of dissertations of limited scope are attached.

Your enrolment as a student must be renewed annually until you have complied with all the requirements for the degree, preferably during the official period of enrolment but before February 28. No re-registrations will be accepted after February 28. You will only be entitled to the guidance of your supervisor if annual proof of registration can be submitted.

Yours sincerely

Ms Wiida Stander

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