

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Just to learn about other people's cultures is not to learn about the racism of one's own. To learn about the racism of one's own, on the other hand, is to approach other cultures objectively.”

(Sivanandan 1983, quoted in Crozier, 1989:78)

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this study was to determine which educational and underlying emotional needs could arise from the cultural, socio-economic and historico-political orientation of black Grade Nine learners who attend a traditionally white school. This objective was reached, firstly, by means of a **theoretical study** and, secondly, by means of an **empirical study** of various dimensions of these learners' life-worlds. In this chapter, important findings from both research methods are synthesised and listed, and conclusions are drawn. Recommendations for future research and for improving the quality of accommodation at school are also made.

7.2 SUMMARY

7.2.1 The theoretical and literature study

The theoretical and literature study served as a foundation for the empirical study and focused on a number of areas.

In Chapter 1, the background to and actuality of the problem, the statement of the problem and the research aim were set out. The assumption that, due to different life orientations (cultural, social, economic and historico-political), black learners could experience specific educational and underlying emotional needs, was contextualised.

In Chapter 2, aspects of black learners' cultural and home situations were dealt with.

In Chapter 3, a culture-general framework was operationalised in the context of a traditionally white school. The main stumbling blocks and facilitating elements that black learners could encounter upon entering a traditionally white school were discussed according to this culture-general framework.

7.2.2 The empirical study

Chapter 4 focused on the design and methodology of the empirical research and offered an explanation of the rationale for and application of the empirical research. As this was a two-phase research design, both the quantitative and the qualitative research methods were employed. The most probable intent of a two-phase design is to triangulate or “converge” the findings (Creswell, 1994:184,189). In this study, a two-phase design was used to ensure that phenomena could be understood even better, given that the two methods are interrelated, supportive of and complementary to each other. Consequently, a multifaceted and holistic picture of learners' experience of and needs in a traditionally white school can be obtained. Eight schools in the greater Gauteng area were involved in the empirical research. A structured questionnaire was applied to black Grade Nine learners during school visits. Individual semi-structured focus interviews were also conducted with learners and teaching personnel.

In Chapter 5, the findings and interpretation of the questionnaire were discussed as the quantitative component of the research.

Chapter 6 concentrated on the interviews, as the qualitative component of the empirical research. The results were summarised in Sections 6.5 and 6.9.

7.3 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This research has given a number of learners “voices” which enabled them to draw attention to their feelings about and needs in the school. With that the opportunity arises to help schools and educational reform movements to respond better to the needs of such learners. The most prominent findings from the quantitative and qualitative studies were confirmed by the literature study and are integrated and listed in this section.

In terms of the affirmation of the value of schooling, learners basically display the same attitude as was found in previous studies (both local and abroad). In this study, however, the researcher came to the conclusion that one of the more important issues identified as a stumbling block to school accommodation centres around racism. Other important stumbling blocks to school accommodation concern learners' feelings about school rules, the Afrikaans language and teachers. Some of the findings in this study have profound implications for the approaches and practices currently in use – not so much in terms of **what** is done, but rather of **how** it is done. Next, the research findings are presented in terms of the three dimensions that were researched.

7.3.1 The family dimension

- In the family dimension, the most prominent findings appear to be that high parental expectations put pressure on learners to perform scholastically – in many instances above their capabilities and in schools that would not necessarily have been their first choice, either because of a language problem or a particularly high academic standard.
- Many learners stay in the townships. Being on time for school demands much extra effort. Furthermore, the family support system is often inadequate in that learners (particularly girls) are burdened with too much responsibility for housework and sibling care, which leaves little time for studying. It appears that many parents are ignorant about the time demands of schoolwork, but are willing to co-operate when they are better informed.
- The data indicates that authority relationships within the family are still reasonably intact, and parents' traditional viewpoints are still respected by a large number of learners. However, there seems to be a general lack of communication between parents and children. The parent-child relationship appears to lack emotional intimacy, since few learners felt they could discuss personal matters with their parents or caregivers. Consequently, many learners do not receive the benefit of parental or other adult guidance in handling their personal problems and basic life issues.

- The mode of discipline respondents were mostly exposed to, was being talked to. The general quality of discipline may be questioned, since being shouted at and other negative methods of punishment constitute a large percentage of the disciplinary actions reported by the respondents. In the majority of cases, the disciplinarian is female, highlighting the important role that mothers or other female caregivers play as the parents or caregivers who usually carry most responsibility for childcare.
- It seems that traditional Afri-centric values are still an influential aspect in the family system. Learners appear to find themselves in the unenviable situation of being in transition. This means that they inhabit two different life-worlds, in that they are expected to be as much part of an Africa-oriented culture as they are of a Westernised culture. This leaves these learners to deal with the dilemma of a double-bind situation – an extremely difficult situation in which many learners receive neither the necessary support, recognition, nor guidance.

7.3.2 The individual dimension

- In the individual dimension it was found that learners have good self-esteem. This finding is in line with current research and thought on minority groups, but is still surprising, considering the regular exposure to either subtle or overt displays of racism at school. It appears that there are a number of protective and buffering processes which can protect the self-esteem of minority groups (Foster, 1994:236-237). However, regular exposure to racism could possibly have generated, at least to some degree, the negative self-responses regarding the scale item “I wish I could like myself more”. Respondents felt marginalised and it appears that their self-esteem can easily be shaken by inconsiderate actions.
- Learners have to juggle identities between two different life-worlds in that, apart from functioning in their own culture, they also have to interpret accurately cultural rules not their own.

- Learners have unrealistically high social, scholastic and career aspirations. There are, however, indications that many struggle with their schoolwork and that they do not devote the time to their studies needed in order to achieve their goals.
- Self-esteem and encouragement by parents of learners to attend to studies, as well as an ability to confide in their parents, were positively correlated.
- There was limited evidence of identity confusion.

7.3.3 The school/cultural dimension

- Some learners prefer to socialise with out-group (white) learners rather than with in-group (black) learners.
- There appears to be some realisation of big differences between African and Western traditions.
- Indications are that wealth and scholastic excellence are attributes that are not sanctioned by the group.
- The majority of respondents are happy at school. The reasons specified for unhappiness when at school centre around interpersonal relationships and mainly concern teachers and social factors.
- Learners concede the importance of good schooling but some appear to go on simply because they feel they should, as this would give them upward mobility in life. They view their schools as good educational institutions and as providing much better quality schooling than can be found in the townships.
- When given a choice of schools, the majority would choose a school where all race groups are equally represented. A very small minority would prefer an all-black school population. It was found that the frequency of racist remarks influenced learners' preference regarding the composition of the learner population in a school. This could be interpreted as a wish genuinely to belong to and be accepted in the schools they are currently attending.

- It appeared that many respondents dislike the institutional control of the school in the form of rules that control their dress code and general freedom of behaviour. School rules are the most frequently cited factor that learners want to change about their schools. However, the need for discipline is quite well understood and there is a distinct need for externally imposed order and discipline. The majority of learners were against corporal punishment, although about a fifth of the respondents would be in favour of it. However, it is regarded as extremely important that discipline should be fair and devoid of any racial bias whatsoever.
- English is only spoken in very few of the respondents' homes. Despite this, it is still the language most popular as the medium of instruction, but a fairly high level of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) was reasonably common (see Section 1.2).
- There is extreme antipathy towards the Afrikaans language. It is viewed as undesirable, as being of limited use and as difficult to cope with. It is the third most frequently cited factor learners want to change about their schools.
- Although most respondents regard being punctual for school as important, a number still condone getting to school late. There are, however, indications that some learners think in terms of a future-oriented time perspective.
- Condoning latecoming for school and time spent on schoolwork are significantly correlated. Learners who condone latecoming appear not to be motivated to do their homework, whereas those who spend some time on their homework do not condone latecoming.
- It appears that communication based on traditional courtesy, such as loud talk, the undesirability of eye contact as a sign of respect and the extent of personal space maintained during conversations can cause cultural misunderstanding, as these issues are approached from learners' own cultural mindset(s).
- The data indicate that respondents see the interests of the group as more important than the interests of individuals to the point of sacrificing individual comfort and well-being.

- It appears that some learners could experience group pressure regarding the undesirability of individual achievement and excellence.
- Although the preferred way of conflict resolution appears to be discussion, more than a third of respondents would opt for more drastic measures, including the use of physical force. There was a strong, though not statistically significant, relationship between the ways in which trouble is handled at school and feeling happy/unhappy when at school. The manner in which trouble is handled at school and working harder at a subject learners dislike are significantly correlated. It was found that learners who would work harder at a subject they disliked would also handle trouble at school by admitting their guilt and apologising, but the converse was also strongly correlated: learners who would not work harder at a subject they dislike would also not admit guilt and apologise if they got into trouble at school.
- It appears that, in class, questions will not easily be asked spontaneously.
- Many respondents either regard females as inferior disciplinarians or are unsure about the issue. A narrow majority believe without a doubt that women can administer discipline as well as men can.
- It appears that the majority of learners are prepared to accept the blame if they cannot complete their studies or if they have done something wrong at school, according to their responses to the questionnaire. From the teacher interviews, however, it appears that learners do not easily admit to it when they have done something wrong, and could in fact go so far as to challenge the school's code of conduct by refusing to submit to being disciplined for a transgression.
- On the aspect of honesty, the majority of learners stated that they will not keep what they have picked up, but about two-fifths of the learners will either keep such an object or are uncertain whether they should do so. Although the majority maintained that they will not help classmates to “crib” during exams, it is alarming that some would be willing to provide answers. The majority will ask first before borrowing from others, but a few indicated that permission is not necessary.

- Despite extremely high academic and occupational aspirations, the time spent on schoolwork by the majority of respondents does not exceed two hours per day. It therefore appears that learners do not see any relationship between personal input and academic success. Although most respondents indicated a preparedness to work hard at a disliked subject, a substantial number of respondents are not prepared to do so or are uncertain. Almost half of the respondents prefer not to be examined to determine who should pass or fail.
- The frequency of racist insults experienced and relations between cultural groups were significantly correlated. Racism was the factor second most frequently cited by learners in terms of what they want to change about their school. The vast majority of learners indicated that racist insults occur “very often” or “sometimes”, which demonstrates that this is a contentious issue. The frequency of racist insults and the medium of instruction of the schools are significantly correlated. It was found that the frequency of racist insults was higher at Afrikaans-medium schools than at English-medium schools. Of the learners who described intercultural relations at their school as “co-operate but do not mix” most experienced racist insults only “sometimes”. By contrast, among those who chose the “putting up with one another” option, few never experienced racist insults or name-calling. There was limited evidence that white girls are experienced as being more relaxed about interracial contact than white boys. At the same time, there is some indication that black girls recognise the fact that white girls are also exposed to intra-cultural group pressure concerning intercultural relationships.

7.3.4 Facilitating elements

The elements of an approachable and supportive teaching staff, as well as a need for fair and equitable disciplinary measures qualified, according to the interviews, as elements that could facilitate an accommodating school environment. However, from the questionnaire a more contradictory approach emerged towards discipline and teachers, since learners rated school rules as the aspect they would most like to change at school. Teachers were rated fourth among the elements these respondents would most like to change. A possible explanation for such a contradiction could be that the learners differentiate between discipline and rules.

Discipline could be seen as effecting general order in the school, while rules could represent restrictions that control learners' time, dress code and space – in short their freedom of behaviour and movement. For this reason, rules are deeply resented. However, despite the resentment of rules, learners do value the fact that there is no breakdown of order, and, hence, discipline and rules remain important facilitating elements, provided they are fair.

The interviews indicated a feeling of goodwill between teachers and learners. The teachers were generally regarded as approachable and very supportive. However, during the interviews, strong emotions accompanied a number of references to individual teachers and incidents that were regarded as racist and demeaning. In the questionnaire, teachers who were seen as racist were unkindly mentioned and even referred to by name. This suggests that learners do not stereotype teachers as racist or unkind, but that they know that teachers have individual characteristics. The story of Mr Chips is a case in point. This illustrates that teachers have an invaluable role to play in the creation of an accommodating school environment.

7.3.5 Conclusion

From the analysis of the literature and the empirical research data, it was found that black Grade Nine learners in traditional white schools do experience specific emotional and educational problems. In the light of the above, the hypothesis of this research project can be verified, namely that black Grade Nine learners in traditionally white schools experience specific educational and underlying emotional needs.

The most important findings of the four dimensions are summarised in Table 7.1. The summary is done according to the following principles: the research findings that were supported by both research methods, namely the questionnaire and the teacher and learner interviews, are listed first. Next, the findings supported by the learner and teacher interviews are listed, followed by the findings supported by the questionnaire and teacher interviews. Those findings that were supported by only one of the research methods are also listed. Contradictions in the research findings are indicated at the end of Table 7.1.

The following key is used in the table:

- Q = Questionnaires
L = Learner interview(s)
T = Teacher interview(s)

Combinations of these elements are set to group findings. The findings are presented in the following order: first, L/T/Q are presented; second, L/T; third, T/Q; fourth, L; fifth, Q; and finally, T.

Table 7.1 overleaf

Table 7.1: Summary

STUMBLING BLOCKS						FACILITATING ELEMENTS	
The family dimension		The individual dimension		The school/cultural dimension			
L/T/Q	Learners communicate between two life-worlds (culturally and physically)	L/T/Q	Learners display good self-esteem. However, attacks with racist undertones affect self-concept	L/T/Q	Racism is found throughout these schools. It is the factor second most frequently cited as needing to be changed.	L/T	There is a feeling of goodwill towards other learners and staff
L/T/Q	Learners cannot discuss personal problems or dating matters with parents	L/T/Q	Learners do not spend the required time on their schoolwork to realise their ambitions	L/T/Q	Learners appear to struggle with schoolwork, especially languages	L/T	Learners are generally proud of their schools
L/T/Q	Learners feel pressurised to help with household duties	L/T/Q	Learners have high social and scholastic aspirations	L/T/Q	Stereotyping due to misinterpretation of culturally-correct communicative behaviour	L/T	Uniforms create a sense of pride and belonging
L/T	Household duties leave little time for schoolwork	L/T/Q	Learners experience control at school – require freedom of choice regarding other matters	L/T/Q	Communication appears to be approached from a cultural mindset.	L/T	Ability to achieve scholastically or in other spheres inspires positive feeling
L/T	Learners feel pressurised by parents to perform scholastically	L/T/Q	Learners feel marginalised at school	L/T/Q	Learners tend to want to solve conflict through physical force/violence	L/T	Social gatherings aid feeling of belonging
L/T	Parental expectations of learners are very high	L/T	Learners experience a double-bind situation	L/T/Q	Scholastic excellence is frowned upon by the group	L/T	Mutual acceptance based on individual characteristics and not group characteristics is regarded as a powerful facilitating element

Table 7.1 is continued overleaf

Table 7.1 (continued)

The family dimension		The individual dimension		The school/cultural dimension		Facilitating elements	
L/T	Parents choose the school, leaving learners to cope with demanding and difficult scholastic situations and very high standards	T/Q	Learners find it problematic to see a relationship between good marks/ achievement and input	L/T/Q	Afrikaans is undesirable, of limited use and difficult to cope with (language – 3rd factor learners want to change)	L	Teachers are generally considered approachable and supportive
		L	There is some evidence of identity confusion	L/T/Q	Latecoming elicited various responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some demanded special treatment/leniency • some felt school should be grateful learners turn up at all • some showed growing acceptance of rules that govern latecoming • some levelled criticism against peers who come late • some revealed a future-oriented time perspective 	L	The need for discipline is quite well understood
				L/T	There is a realisation of big differences between African and Western traditions	L	Learners experience a need for externally imposed order and discipline
				L/T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners feel marginalised • They feel belittled and devalued due to stereotyping and/or verbal and/or physical abuse 	L	Discipline must be fair, devoid of racial bias. Feedback through rewards is important

Table 7.1 is continued overleaf

Table 7.1 (continued)

The family dimension		The individual dimension		The school/cultural dimension		Facilitating elements	
				L/T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group pressure promote anti-social behaviour amongst learners Group pressure allows little individual freedom 	L	Good intercultural working relationships are important
				L/T	Individual wealth is frowned upon by the group	Q	Learners prefer multicultural schools
				L/T	Alcohol, tobacco and dagga most frequently abused substances		
				T/Q	Female teachers not regarded as disciplinarians		
				L	Learners require more understanding, empathy, cultural awareness and sensitivity within intercultural context		
				L	White girls more relaxed about interracial interaction than white boys		
				L	Some learners socialise with the out-group (white) rather than the in-group (black)		
				L	White learners are also exposed to intra-cultural group pressure concerning intercultural relationships		

Table 7.1 is continued overleaf

Table 7.1 (continued)

The family dimension		The individual dimension		The school/cultural dimension		Facilitating elements	
				L	The media could promote anti-social behaviour amongst learners		
				L	Taking part in athletics is scorned by the group		
				Q	Teachers are the factor 4th most cited as needing to be changed		
				T	Learners experience problems with study methods		
CONTRADICTIONS IN THE FINDINGS							
L	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners concede a need for externally imposed order and discipline BUT						
Q	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School rules is the first important factor in the order of importance that learners cite as a factor they would like to change about their school. Also, this is the fourth most important factor cited as causing unhappiness when learners are at school. 						
L	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers are regarded as approachable and supportive BUT						
Q	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers are cited as the fourth most important factor learners would like to change about their school. Also, teachers are cited as the most important factor causing unhappiness at school 						
Q	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in sport was indicated as the most popular extra-mural activity BUT						
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is limited participation in sport activity 						
Q	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners say they would accept blame for something done wrong in school or if they cannot complete their studies BUT						
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners do not admit easily to transgressions and challenge the code of conduct if they are punished 						
Q	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners display high occupational aspirations BUT						
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners are not prepared to spend much time on schoolwork. 						

7.3.6 Implications of the study

In a multicultural school system, the challenge for teachers is to meet the needs of learners from pre-industrial, modern and post-modern environments and different cultural, socio-economic and historico-political backgrounds. This will prepare learners for life in a world where they will meet, live and work with fellow citizens from diverse backgrounds. It is imperative that teachers should possess the necessary interpersonal and professional skills to negotiate complex situations that might arise in the school.

The research findings suggest that racism is a central issue and therefore a core stumbling block to good accommodation at school. The ideology of crude racism in South Africa has been buried along with the past. Nevertheless, it appears to be reincarnated and flourishing in many subtle, and some not so subtle, guises within South African society, and consequently in South African schools. Racism is an ideology that assigns a higher value to one group's rights compared to the value assigned to other groups' or individuals' rights. No human being should experience his/her worth as a person only in relation to being a member of a white, black or brown group, but this appears to be an important problem for many learners at school.

As with any complicated issue, there is no simple solution. Being knowledgeable about other cultures can only solve part of the problem, as this results only in tolerance. Tolerance in itself is insufficient, in that it indicates mere endurance of and not respect for other cultures. The solution involves changes of attitude toward, rather than only the acquisition of knowledge about, other cultures. Also, multiculturalism should not be treated as a series of isolated experiences. Instead, it should form part of the curriculum, and teacher training should incorporate multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills as part of the teachers' course. In the light of the findings of this study, this means that rather than being regarded as an appendix to traditionally white schools, black learners and their cultures should be regarded as an integral part of these schools. There is therefore a serious need for the application of an approach that would counteract racism in schools.

Gillborn (1995:120) advocates anti-racism as such an approach, in that it does not downplay the important aspects of cultural diversity, but rather aims to combat racism. Gillborn (1995:80,172,175) refers to Troyna and Hatcher (1992) as saying that any racist

incident is about the misuse of power. Such transgressions or attacks may be perpetrated by white learners against black learners, or vice versa. Consequently, by no means can white learners be singled out as the only ones who are capable of “committing” racism. Gillborn warns, however, that by adopting a doctrinaire approach of “symbolic” or “moral” anti-racism, the legitimacy of an anti-racism approach may be undermined. (Symbolic or moral anti-racism is described as an extreme and reductionist form of anti-racism. This approach assumes the factors of race and racism to be dominant in the experiences of black and white learners, with the former cast as the victims and the latter as the aggressors.) Rather, the answer lies in a commitment to equality, which translates into a genuine concern for the rights of all learners as individuals, as they go about their daily school routine in the classroom and playground. Where anti-racism is taken seriously, perpetrators should be dealt with according to the merits of the situation without resorting to “automatically” pointing out a culprit.

Therefore, effective school accommodation does not imply the assimilation of one culture by another. Instead, the basis for accommodation at school – as in society as a whole – lies in the **recognition of and respect for the rights of the individual**, as opposed to the **rights of any cultural or race group**.

7.3.7 Limitations of the study

Although this study used a two-phase design, the design was limited to the method, results and discussion sections. Creswell (1994:186) discusses a similar study. The original intention behind using a two-phase design in this study was to triangulate research findings. However, this mixing of methods could have been broadened to include an examination of different and overlapping facets, or to use the methods sequentially to find contradictions and new perspectives, as suggested by Creswell (1994:189).

The validity and reliability of the investigation depends on the validity and reliability of the instrument used. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire designed by the researcher. It met the criterion of internal validity. The questionnaire was designed on the basis of a thorough review of relevant literature and was compiled with the assistance of experts and authorities in this field. The questionnaire’s compilation was discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The researcher does not attempt to extrapolate from this study to all Grade Nine learners in traditionally white schools. However, on the basis of the data obtained from these respondents, as well as the researcher's experience as educational advisor and the information gleaned from the literature study, it would appear feasible to propose that the findings may be valid for a broader group than only these particular respondents.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of this study and the important role that society, schools and families can play to improve the quality of accommodation at schools, a number of recommendations are set out below. These guidelines can help to work towards the goal of improved accommodation.

7.4.1 Society

As schools do not exist in isolation, they reflect the state of society to a large extent. In order then for schools to become truly accommodating and value the rights of the individual, society should also work at change.

7.4.2 School

Because learners construct their identities to a large extent in the context provided by the school, it is of great importance to pay attention to their feelings about school. An accommodating school environment means a fostering, supportive and comfortable environment, where learners feel valued for the individuals they are. Such an environment takes into account possible cultural dilemmas and the fact that some learners could find themselves in a double-bind situation.

Only an approach involving change on all levels of schooling – a whole-school approach – can transform schools from mere portals of knowledge into institutions which provide quality accommodation for all learners. The following guidelines have been identified:

7.4.2.1 *Sensitive management style*

Any process of change in schools hinges on personal interaction between colleagues, as well as between teachers and learners. Therefore, the practice of a sensitive management style, as opposed to a dogmatic leadership style, especially with regard to the introduction of an anti-racism approach, is particularly important in effecting successful transformation. The management structure of schools should encourage and be supportive of initiatives involving change and should only intervene strategically when really necessary.

7.4.2.2 *General staff development and training*

The development and training of staff regarding the school's policy on dealing with racism is very important. What has proved to be effective abroad is the establishment of core groups of school staff within schools (Gillborn, 1995:180). Such groups have the task of establishing what the adoption of a particular approach, such as anti-racism, might mean for a specific school, since the needs of various schools manifest themselves differently. The ultimate aim would be to recruit the support of the whole staff (including the administrative staff) to become involved in a whole-school approach to change.

7.4.2.3 *Guidelines for teaching staff*

Certain research findings can serve as guidelines to develop better accommodation strategies at school. These are the following:

- Learners should, first and foremost, be treated as individuals, and not as representatives of a particular culture or group of people.
- It is vital that any disciplinary measures should not favour anybody, but that they should be applied fairly and consistently. However, the rationale of rules that are seen as unaccommodating should be discussed with groups representing all learners, and not only those in leadership positions. Learners should be given the opportunity to become involved in the drawing up of the code of conduct. Rules and values decided on should regularly be reflected on, evaluated and possibly reviewed. Cultural determinants and an Afri-centric world-view should be considered.

- As Limited English Proficiency (LEP) presents a severe and extensive problem, this phenomenon should be accommodated to the best of the school's ability within the confines of the means at the school's disposal. The establishment of bridging classes should be considered where there are none. Access to existing classes should be facilitated.

At enrolment, the implications of choosing a particular medium of instruction should be set out clearly for learners, and they should know that they have a choice in schools.

7.4.2.4 *Guidelines for learners*

- All learners should be made aware that they have a right to a physically and mentally “safe” school environment where any form of racial harassment towards learners of any creed or colour will not be tolerated. However, should such incidents occur, learners should feel free to “voice” their experiences and have the assurance that school staff will deal with the matter in a fair and equitable manner.
- Discipline should be fair.
- The school should encourage learners to ask questions and a critical approach towards society as a whole, and taken-for-granted assumptions in particular. Such an approach is needed to challenge obsolete ideologies and should, as a by-product, encourage learners to ask questions spontaneously in class. The dangerous idea that all whites are racists and all black people are victims should be challenged (Gillborn, 1995:179).
- It is important for learners not to experience the norms upheld as those of the school as unattainable due to an experience of themselves as “different”. Norms should display a distinctly multicultural character, or at least accommodate learners of various cultures and creeds.
- In the stratified society of South Africa, it has to be remembered that for some students, entering traditionally white schools is like entering foreign terrain. The only way to enable all learners to enjoy equal opportunities at school is not to

overlook their cultural context. Therefore, all learners should be given an opportunity to study other cultures, religions and languages. Acquiring knowledge breaks down ignorance and fosters tolerance, understanding and sensitivity towards other cultural groups, as well as an understanding of the interdependence of nations in a global village. However, such an approach may never culminate in patronising or condescending behaviour. It must be remembered that this approach is insufficient to effect good intercultural relationships by itself and is only effective as part of a whole-school and especially a general societal approach.

7.4.2.5 *Counselling groups*

Learners receive very confusing messages from society. Schooling should create an opportunity for them to verbalise their concerns and fears about a range of family and societal problems. Establishing peer counselling groups involving educational psychologists can fulfil this need. The reality of the various cultural and ethnic groupings within society can be explored in this way and learners can be helped to “negotiate meanings to the complex and divided society that we live in and to understand the influences and constraints on their lives” (Bennett, Sohal & Wale, 1995:148). It is particularly important to help learners to understand who they are and to help them make sense of their lives. Issues such as racism, harassment, violence, equality, media messages regarding body image, as well as images of masculinity and femininity are all topics that might prove to be particularly troublesome and therefore could require group counselling.

7.4.2.6 *Life-skills training*

In addition, it is also important that learners receive general life skills training in order to empower them to manage their own lives and make informed decisions. This is especially important considering that they could experience the stress of having to cope with a double-bind situation characteristic of a transitional phase.

7.4.2.7 *Study skills*

During the research it was found that many learners lack effective study skills. They also need to allocate more time for and generally be more dedicated to their studies. Study skills could possibly be incorporated as part of the life skills training.

7.4.2.8 *Parental guidance*

The teaching of parenting skills could help parents to provide more optimally supportive home environments for their children. Also it should sensitise parents to the demands of the school. The parent community should also be involved in and consulted about school matters.

7.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research could focus on:

- the presence of various types of violence in multicultural schools and its effect on intercultural interaction within schools;
- the role of gender differences in challenging racism at secondary school level;
- the role of the school and family in encouraging or impeding the formulation of collective or individual identities;
- learners' differentiation between school rules and discipline; and
- the design of parental guidance programmes aimed at the family in transition.

7.6 SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Truly accommodating schools further the psychological health and mental hygiene of their total learner population. This requires teaching values, attitudes and life-skills required for coping with the demands of the twenty-first century and should result in healthy, happy, confident and capable South African citizens.

All learners should be treated fairly and equitably, regardless of race, gender or culture.

We still have to proceed from racial relationships to human relationships. Maybe then most learners will indicate “no” as the appropriate response to the questionnaire item “I wish I could like myself more”.