

CHAPTER ONE

LEARNER AND EDUCATOR INTERACTION IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous South African government created an environment of imbalanced conditions in all spheres of life. The education system promoted racial, cultural, economic, political and gender inequalities. The existence of racially exclusive departments, provinces, homelands and self-governing territories resulted in the fragmentation of the education systems into nineteen different departments. Such a fragmented management structure prevented the implementation of a single national policy on any matter pertaining to education. The Department of National Education merely acted as an umbrella department for general policy.

When apartheid practices were prohibited in South Africa, multicultural schools in Johannesburg (Gauteng) mushroomed and many black learners moved to suburban schools. The South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 states that South Africa seeks to “provide the education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a foundation for development of all people’s talents and capabilities.”

Currently South Africa is undergoing the process of change which began in April 1994. This is changing from the apartheid era has instituted a constitution that brings democracy to all its citizens. The democratic constitution does not mainly concentrate on politics or health systems, but also gives strong emphasis on the education system. As evidence of this transformation, especially in education,

where a learner is involved, I wish to note that the government that is striving for democracy has presented legislation that will promote positive learner and educator interaction in multicultural secondary schools in Johannesburg and in South Africa as a whole.

The legislation is known as the “South African Schools Act 84 of 1996”. The Act states in its preamble that “this country requires a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in educational provision, and provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners, and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all people’s talents and capabilities” (SASA, 1996:2(a):11).

The Act has provided a new method of implementation in respect of school management, governance and learner involvement. In multicultural schools it aims to promote a positive learning atmosphere, encourage learner interaction, which includes involvement as well as making multicultural environments as effective as possible.

Transformation, particularly in education has brought about change in people’s perceptions. Previously educators were expected to be the ones who know more about what is good for learners, and learners viewed as people who should receive what they were being given without questioning. Seeing that the study examines the influence of learner-educator interaction in multicultural schools it is, therefore, necessary that “learners must be motivated to question inequalities in society and strive for structural changes to promote a fair, just and equal society” (Davies, 1992:10).

The abovementioned information moved me and tempted me to undertake a process of research which is above all, driven by an interest in wanting to gain a wide view on how learner and educators interact in class, as well as how learners interact among themselves inside and outside the classrooms.

The interaction that this study revolves around (in simple terms) has to do with the involvement of a learner in class activities such as group discussions; reading; leadership roles and openness with the educator on issues that need clarification.

The advantage with a learner who is open and participates in activities such as those mentioned above is that he/she becomes exposed to many of life's realities which he/she has never experienced before for example, by knowing the fellow learners better and their different cultures, as well as acquiring skills and self-actualisation in leadership roles and in many facets of education in multicultural schools. In the end these enable him/her talents in and outside the classroom. Such behaviour influences the interaction between learner and educator positively in multicultural schools. One might say this is a planned interaction in the sense that a learner and the educator have both reached a common goal, which is for the educator to educate and for a learner to learn. A learner is in a position to interact and contribute positively in society in future.

The study revolves around the influence of multicultural situations in classroom on learner involvement. In this study it is important to highlight to the reader that, the concept 'learner involvement' may have different connotations which could still have learning implications, but my interest and drive for this research lie on how a learner, as someone who is in the process of wanting to know or learn something, and the educator, as someone who imparts knowledge to the learner -who does not know or knows little of what is to be learnt-, interact with each other. The study revolves around multicultural situations. Therefore, learner involvement in this regard focuses on how two human beings (that is, educator and learner) of different colour interact in class and also how learners of different colour interact inside and outside the classroom. For example, do black and white learners understand each other well, or do black learners understand white

educators well? The positive interaction between these two parties will strengthen relations inside as well as outside the classrooms.

In gathering data for this study, I will observe how the learner and the educator interact (first) at the classroom level and later outside the classroom. This refers to the two selected multicultural secondary schools in Johannesburg (Gauteng district eleven). The observations involve the teaching of Afrikaans, English and IsiZulu. The reason why I chose the above-named subjects is because they are languages which are taught in the selected schools and, as a matter of fact, I consider language to be a driving vehicle for all what is to be learned. This is supported by Shuter and Shooter (1992:72) when they write; “a language is a vehicle for the exploration of a new world of meaning.”

The learner’s thoughts in the classroom (in particular) should be extrinsically interpreted in a form of language. Quite often is the language that the learner is conversant with, so that languages such as “Afrikaans, English, Zulu, Sesotho and Xhosa remain strong and viable choices” (Shuter & Shooter, 1992:72). Vygotsky and Chomsky (2003:71) argue that “language and thought are inextricably linked and for their cognitive development all children need language to underpin and evolve their thoughts. They further say if children are denied their primary language during their formative years and are not yet efficient in their second language to form cognitive concepts, their cognitive development is and remains irretrievably inhabited”

Learners belonging to different racial groups (except IsiZulu) are interested in learning more of IsiZulu in, as well as outside, the classrooms. This proves the point that “South Africa has a rich diversity of languages with high degree of multilingualism. In the past, however, Afrikaans and English were elevated to ‘super languages’ and the African languages designated as inferior ‘home languages’.”

The core concept of this study revolves around 'culture', and my argument is that each culture is practised and strengthened through its language. Therefore, multicultural secondary schools should encourage such practices by including multi-languages in their curriculum design.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem statement emanates from the introductory paragraph, which identified the need for an investigation into a learner-educator interaction in multicultural secondary schools in Johannesburg (Gauteng) particularly those in district eleven. This study will determine how a learner involves himself/herself in school activities inside and outside the classroom.

The research problem revolves around the questions listed below

- What is the influence of multicultural situation on the relations and the interaction between a learner and the educator in, as well as outside, the classroom?
- What strategies can be put to place in an attempt to encourage learner involvement in a multicultural school?
- What are the implications of the interaction between learner and the educators inside and outside the classrooms?

1.3 THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the research is to examine how multicultural schools in Johannesburg influence learner involvement and the interaction between learners and the educators inside and outside the classroom.

To achieve the above-mentioned aim, the following objectives are being identified:

- to explore the influence of multicultural situation on the relations and the interaction between a learner and the educator inside as well as outside the classroom; and
- to explore strategies that can be put to place in an attempt to encourage learner involvement in a multicultural school.

1.4 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.4.1 Research design

For me to be in a position to examine the influence of multicultural situations in the classroom on learner involvement and the interaction in the two selected schools, a qualitative research method will be implemented. According to Borg, Gall and Gall (1993:287), Salvin (1992:196) and McMillan (2000:252) “a qualitative research approach is associated with the study of behaviour as it occurs naturally and provides an in-depth understanding of context and behaviour. They say the focus is on why and how behaviour occurs as well as the participants’ understanding and meaning they assign to these.”

De Vos, et al. (1998:82) say “data collection methods are the ways in which the research data are obtained.” Therefore, data for this study will be collected by way of conducting interviews with relevant stakeholders mentioned above on the research methodology, and that will be collected from two multicultural secondary schools in the suburbs of Johannesburg.

For the purpose of this study, the observations and individual interviews will be conducted in both school A and B; followed by the focus-group interviews only in

school B. The purpose of conducting focus-group interviews in school B is because I want to ensure the accuracy of the data collected in individual interviews together with what I observed during lesson presentations. "The qualitative research methods that will be used in this study will allow for interaction and could lead to understanding attitudes, behaviours and context from different point of view" (Platton in Richard, 2003:11).

This will be an exploratory study in order to gain knowledge on how multicultural situations can influence learner involvement and interaction in the classroom. According to Mouton and Marais (1990:45) "a goal to pursue in exploratory study is the exploration of an unknown research area in order to gain a new insight into the relevant phenomena. They say that such a study will lead to insights and comprehension, while involving the use of in-depth focus-group interviewing." A study having a contextual interest is bound to the unique context of the domain phenomenon (Mouton & Marais, 1990:50).

The sequence and structure of the research study is set out below.

Chapter one: The background and overview serves as an introduction of the study whereby the identification of the problem; the aim of the study; a brief description of the research methodology and a clarification of concepts will be highlighted.

Chapter two: This presents the literature review on matters related to multicultural education as perceived by different authors.

Chapter three: This chapter will explain the research design and methodology in detail.

Chapter four: The data gathered in chapter three will be analysed and interpreted according to the findings resulting from the research processes.

Chapter five: This chapter will make recommendations and conclusions based on the research in the schools and from the literature.

1.5 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

The concepts of culture, school culture and that of multi-culture education were found to be necessary for purposes of the study and therefore these will be clarified in depth.

1.5.1 Culture

The definition of 'culture' varies considerably, but the idea of shared values and norms seem to be common characteristics. Different authors define 'culture' as follows:

According to Shuter and Shooter (1992:97) the word 'culture' which is derived from the Latin 'cultura' (to cultivate land), has a long history of usage in French and English. The term gradually came to mean cultivation of the human mind. They say that at a later stage still, the concept came to mean civilisation. They mention that culture means "the body of ideas, beliefs, values, activities and traditions that are common to a group of people." They conclude by saying, culture is the 'map of reality' that groups of people willingly share and reinforce, and that culture is dynamic, usually transmitted in modified form from generation to generation.

Murgatroyd and Morgan (1993:65) refer to culture as "the implicit rules, assumptions and values that bind an organisation together." According to Banks

(1994:82) culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

Culture is the system of beliefs, values, customs and traditions shared by members of a group who often also share the same physical objects, symbols and language (Steenkamp, Wade & Robinsons, 2002:37).

Swartz (1998:7) in his studies on culture says, “the concept of culture is often concerned with growth and change. It is also concerned with refinement and sophistication.” Helman (1994:2) in Swartz (1998:7) identifies culture as “a set of guidelines, which directs people’s worldview and understanding of how to conduct themselves in their communities and how to convey these principles to the next generation through symbol, language, ritual and art.” Helman (1994:2) continues his definition by saying, “this is a focus on the ways in which societal rules are enacted, experienced and transmitted. Culture cannot be static as interpretation of rules changes over time with different circumstances.”

Therefore, Bullivant (1984:4) cited in Banks (1994:84), defines culture as “an interdependent and patterned system of valued traditional and transmitted to present new members, both symbolically and non-symbolically which a society has evolved historically and progressively modifies and augments, to give meaning to and to cope with its definition of present and future existential problems.”

1.5.2 School culture

According to Banks (1994:117) school culture “reflects the values, perspectives and behaviours of the students and the educators.” Much has been said on the subject of ‘culture’ and I believe that ‘culture’ and ‘school culture’ share almost

common characteristics. For this reason, I will now focus on the term 'school' as one of the concepts found in the study.

Sibande (2000:20) said that culture is, "a school which is characterised by respect, tolerance and co-operation, and that, it will have educators that will work well with the principal. He further says they will support one another and in the process there will be harmony between the educators. In conclusion he says in turn, "the working relationship between educators and learners will be conducive to work." Van der Westhuizen (1996:631) calls this "educational climate of the school."

Sergiovanni and Starratt (1993:92) endorse the above-mentioned definitions by saying that culture is "a set of understandings or meanings shared by a group of people. Typically, these meanings are facility held and serve to define the group as being distinct from other groups."

Culture is a pattern of meanings embodied in symbols which are transmitted historically. Culture controls action, as well as how people attach meanings to their perceptions (English, 1992:75).

A further elaboration on the definition of culture by Adler (1993:29) is as follows:

- something that is shared by all or almost all members of some social group;
- something that the older members of the group try to pass on to the younger members; and
- something (as in the case of morals, laws and customs) that shapes behaviour, or structures one's perception of the world.

In conclusion, I understand that learning about different cultures in a multicultural secondary school, is a part of the curriculum needs which have to be fulfilled by the school. Such curriculum reduces discrimination and enhances active learner

involvement and interaction in and outside the classroom. Foster (1990:37) supports this by saying, culture means learning about other cultures and traditions and that will reduce discrimination within, and eventually outside, the classroom. Hargreaves (1995:86) express his feelings by saying, “culture may be understood as the human production of meaning and value...”

1.5.3 Multicultural education

Foster (1990:38) says multicultural education is “a whole curriculum which also involved an attitude to life.” According to Sonia Neito, (1992:208) cited in May (1994:6), “multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students.” She also says it challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism ...that students, their communities and educators represent. She continues that, multicultural education permeates the curriculum and instructional strategies used in schools, as well as the interaction among educators, students and parents, and the very way that schools conceptualise the nature of teaching and learning, because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change. She concludes by saying that “multicultural education furthers the democratic principles of social justice.”

Multicultural education is a broad concept that encompasses ethnic studies, multi-ethnic education and anti-racist education. It consists of education reform that is designated to reform the school environment so that many different kinds of groups, including ethnic groups, women and learners with special needs, may experience educational equality and academic parity (Banks, 1992:19).

Boutte (1999:15) emphasises that “although this definition is in essence very similar to Banks’ definition; it adds depth to the understanding because it explores all the characteristics that will influence change and reform. The

curriculum, as well as the relationship between all the role players in an institution like the school, provides a very important factor towards creating an anti-bias and anti-racism ethos. In essence, multicultural education is simply three things: it is a concept, a reform movement and a process.”

According to Swartz (1992:44) multicultural education needs to be conceptualised as a broad-based school reform, and therefore she defines it as “a restatement of sound educational pedagogy and practice that requires the representation of all cultures and groups as significant to the production of knowledge. Multicultural education is an education that uses methodologies and instructional materials which promote equity of information and high standards of academic scholarship in an environment that respects the potential of each student.”

1.6 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

There are a number of multicultural secondary schools in Johannesburg (Gauteng – district eleven), but this study will be limited to two schools which are also situated in the suburbs of Johannesburg. The study will revolve around the learner and educator interaction in multicultural schools, which also involves learner involvement inside and outside the classroom.

1.7 SUMMARY

This chapter sets out a framework for the intention of the study. My argument is that multicultural education can easily influence learner involvement and interaction in a positive manner. Schools in Johannesburg can achieve far more than they do at present) if the aim and purpose of this research can be taken into consideration.

This is an attempt to build a positive perception of multicultural schooling by focusing primarily on findings, recommendations and providing encouragement to those who teach and learn, to make multicultural schools in Johannesburg work. Above all, a climate of free inquiry, free discussion and respect for the views of others will improve multicultural education in secondary school in Johannesburg (Gauteng Province).

Motaung (2003:13) writes that “learners need encouragement, support and guidance from parents and educators, and that all these are acquired gradually during interaction by all concerned.”

Chapter two will focus on the literature review relating to how multicultural education can influence learner educator interaction in the classroom.