Chapter Three:

LITERATURE REVIEW: MULTICULTURAL AND ANTI-RACIST EDUCATION

“Multicultural education and anti-racist education – the interminable debate”.
(Verma, Zec and Skinner, 1994, p. 6)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the ongoing debate between multicultural and anti-racist education. A detailed account of the literature concerning the debate on multicultural education and anti-racist education is given and, finally, an attempt is made to link the findings from the literature to the research study. I discuss the central issue of teaching in racially/culturally diverse classrooms by drawing heavily on the work of Garcia (1993) and by explaining the importance of intercultural knowledge. A discussion of strategies for teaching in a multicultural classroom and ethical classroom management in multicultural classrooms follows on the basis of the “Copernican” view of teaching according to Garcia (1991).

Included in this chapter is an overview of recent critiques of multicultural education in order to show that multicultural education as such is not the answer to problems in racially and culturally diverse classrooms. Many theorists favour anti-racist education as an alternative to multicultural education and since the completion of this thesis another school of thought has emerged in the UK which deals with “After Multiculturalism”, which I do not discuss in this thesis. I then present the debate on anti-racist and multicultural education and this is followed by discussions of the various elements of racially diverse classroom. South Africa is a new democracy with a multicultural population and since South Africa is now part of the global society, multiculturalism has become increasingly important for both teachers and pupils. It is by examining studies on multiculturalism conducted in the UK, USA Australia and Canada that researchers may be able to offer some solutions to the various problems experienced in the multicultural classroom.

In the UK, Canada, Australia and the USA, where populations include ethnic minorities, attempts were made during the 1970s to eradicate racism through the introduction of multicultural education.
Traditionally, multicultural education was perceived (overwhelmingly) as teaching children about other cultures and instilling respect for such cultures in white indigenous children, while at the same time improving the self-image of ethnic minority or immigrant children (Todd, 1991; Foster, 1990; Corner, 1987; Aurora and Duncan (1987). While Lynch (1989) concurs with the above-mentioned theorists, there exists a general agreement among many other theorists, scholars and researchers that for multicultural education to be implemented successfully, changes must be made at an institutional level. Such changes include changes in curriculum, changes in teaching materials, teaching and learning styles, and changes in the attitudes, perceptions and behaviour of teachers.

Troyna (1993) criticises multiculturalism as being an instrument designed to contain militancy and defuse social conflict. He advocates, instead, an anti-racist paradigm that centralises the need to provide the appropriate organisational, pedagogical and curricular context/contexts to enable children to examine the way in which racism rationalises and assists in maintaining injustices and the varying power given to particular groups in society. A very relevant work by Garcia (1993) will be examined, with note taken of aspects of the work that have relevance for South African teaching. Garcia (1993) has done extensive work in the field of teaching in a “pluralistic” society and many of the recommendations he makes have significance for this study.

3.2 Teaching in Culturally Diverse Classrooms

Garcia (1991), referring to teachers in the USA, claims that before teachers reach the end of their teaching career it is likely that they will have to teach pupils from cultures other than their own. The challenge to these teachers will be to make a difference in the lives of their students by teaching them that “they are capable, unique individuals who have a right to be respected by others and a responsibility to respect others” (p vii).

Education models that discourage racism, prejudice and inequality are reviewed by Garcia (1994). He makes profound observations from his experiences in the USA and many of his findings could shed light on the problems in South African schools. His work offers theoretical and practical premises that he has drawn from the behavioural sciences in order to provide an understanding of teaching in racially diverse societies. Garcia (1994) insists that it is necessary to know about other humans, about each other.
Teaching is a “scholarly pursuit” (Garcia, 1991, p. 5) where traditional academic knowledge and cultural awareness should be taught concurrently.

Teaching is “a challenging profession, a difficult task and a poorly rewarded one” (Garcia, 1993, p. 5). There are possibly a number of teachers who would concur with Garcia’s sentiments and use this as an excuse for not having time to learn about other cultures and their languages. Although Garcia’s work does appear to be overly sentimental at times, the messages emanating from it are very clear and bear significant relevance to this research project. There are constant general factors central to the teaching situation, such as the quality of classroom management, instructional strategies, and the pupils’ and teachers’ self-concepts, which are important for good teaching practices. Knowledge of each other’s cultures will contribute towards better classroom relationships.

According to Garcia (1991) there was a time in the USA where the function of a good teacher was to eradicate ethnic differences. Teachers were heard to say “I treat all my students as though they are alike”. Garcia (1991) argues that to treat all students alike ignores students’ fundamental humanity and differences and serves to “submerge” rather than “purge” cultural differences in the classroom. The submerging of differences was elaborated upon under the “colour-blind approach” in the previous chapter. Educational research in the UK illustrates that there was a preference for this approach in the 1970s which is based on the supposition that to address “racial” issues directly might only inflame the situation (Williams, 1979, p. 126 in Gillborn, 1990). The Swann Commission (1985 in Gillborn, 1990) regards “colour-blindness” as negative and a denial of an individual’s identity. The relevance of Garcia’s (1991) argument for this study is that as a result of the submergence of cultural differences, there have been a number of nasty clashes in culturally diverse classrooms in South Africa.

3.2.1 Culturally Diverse Classrooms in South Africa
Historically white former Model C schools, “Indian” schools and “Coloured” schools have become racially/culturally diverse over the past ten years since democracy. As a result of the apartheid policy pupils from racially diverse backgrounds, as well as their white teachers, have not interacted frequently with other racial groups. The object in South African classrooms should not be to submerge cultural difference. Instead the object should be to teach pupils respect for each other’s cultures in the hope of creating harmony. The Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy produced by the Department of Education (2004) calls for the respect for a child’s cultural identity, language and values, as well as the
national values of the country in which the child resides or the country from which the child originates. Additionally, it identifies ten fundamental values of the South African Constitution which are; democracy, social justice and equity, non-racism and non-sexism, ubuntu (human dignity), respect and reconciliation. Could we in South Africa look to multicultural education to assist us in inculcating these values in our pupils?

All classroom activities – such as, classroom management techniques, instructional strategies and self-concepts – operate on assumptions that are embedded in cultural values, attitudes and beliefs. Teaching experiences derive from the conscious and unconscious assumptions that one makes, and are ultimately based on an individual’s cultural perspectives. An understanding of the cultural factor creates the consciousness that is necessary to perceive that transmitting culture and socialising students are inherent in classroom teaching and teaching (Garcia, 1991). Teachers need to take into account the backgrounds of their pupils. Pupils come from diverse backgrounds and South Africa, especially because of its history of segregation and oppression, has created large disempowered communities who experience poverty. The enemies of ignorance, disease, famine and poverty are common in all cultures and nations. It is crucial that teachers remember that we live in a global society and that these enemies that Garcia (1991) refers to are common phenomena here in South Africa as well. Teachers will always encounter pupils from diverse and varied backgrounds and the onus is upon the teacher to assist the child by making a difference in his or her life. Garcia (1991, p. 7) reminds teachers to accept the reality of their students and the cultural milieu from which these students emerge:

To make a difference in the lives of students you as a teacher must liberate yourself from provincial and narrow conceptions about people… try to elicit excellence within the context of the student’s own cultural perspectives.

3.2.2 Ethical Classroom Management in Multicultural Classrooms

Teachers must practice ethical transcendence, that is, develop an ethical system of classroom management that transcends all cultural differences and operates on norms that are fair to all students.

(Garcia, 1991, p. 8)

The “Copernican” view of teaching that Garcia (1991) describes, has considerable significance for South Africa. This view holds that the universe of teaching and learning consists of vast galaxies of cultures and human groups; it is based on the cultural diversity of American society. The Copernican view recommends that all cultures are viewed as co-existent, and abandons all paradigms that refer to other
cultures as “underdeveloped”, “overdeveloped”, and “primitive”. This view further eliminates educational labels such as those identifying “non-white”, “non-middle-class” students as “culturally deprived”, “disadvantaged” or “culturally deficient”. If this view is adopted in the world of teaching and learning, it can serve to liberate teachers and assist them in transcending the narrow confines of their own cultures (Garcia, 1991).

There are no panaceas for teaching in a “pluralistic society”, but Garcia (1991) provides models and strategies for teaching and learning in these classrooms. Both in–service teachers and pre–service teachers in South African schools could benefit from Garcia’s recommendations. South Africa lags behind the rest of the world in the preparation of its pupils through multicultural education to be part of the global society. This is because of the long history of segregation.

The impact of segregated schools has led to a situation in which very few teachers will have had any experience of working in other than segregated classrooms. Colleges of Education have also been largely segregated so that newly qualified teachers not only lack teaching experience but also will have received little guidance or introduction to strategies appropriate to multicultural education.

The development and implementation of teacher education curricula facilitating multicultural teaching is a major task in the reconstruction of society. Teachers will play essential roles in the creation of learning climates which are tolerant, purposeful and which promote harmonious interactions between children, irrespective of colour.

(Freer, 1992, p. 32)

It is, therefore, the responsibility of lecturers in universities to inculcate in pre–service teachers the attitudes and enthusiasm vital to the facilitation of progress towards a non-racial democratic society in South Africa that can take its place in the global arena. Garcia’s (1991) concepts, models and strategies for teaching in culturally diverse classrooms could prove to be a valuable source if adapted for use in South African institutions to meet the demands of a global society.

### 3.3 Assumptions Underpinning Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is a heterogeneous concept that changes in response to different educational concerns, encompasses a wide range of conflicting assumptions and practices. In this regard Grant and Sleeter (1989) claim that multicultural education is a complex and ever changing field. Critics as well as
advocates of multicultural education often assume that it is a fairly homogeneous set of practices, and that all advocates subscribe to the same end and to the same model of social change. The field is often treated as static and homogeneous rather than as dynamic and growing, and needing to deal with its own internal debate.

“Multicultural education is a reform movement designed to change the total educational environment in order to grant equal opportunities to students from diverse cultural and ethnic groups, including gender groups, gifted students, and students from each social class group” (Todd, 1991; Banks and McGee Banks, 1997). This claim about multiculturalism refers to what has become the dominant conception in the closing decade of the twentieth century. Ethnic diversity is seen by multiculturalists as a positive element that elevates a nation and enables citizens to resolve personal and public problems, thereby providing opportunities for other cultures to be experienced (Foster, 1990).

When multicultural education was researched in the late 1960s and early 1970s there were a number of conceptions about multicultural education. For the purpose of this study I distinguish between two dominant conceptions that provided by Bullivant (1979) and Hernandez (1989) which will serve as a basis for examining the changing concepts in multicultural education.

**Multicultural education** was first discussed in the late 1960s. **Three key assumptions** underpin this early conception of multicultural education according to a study conducted by Bullivant in the late 1970s. The **first assumption** is that if an ethnic (sic) child learns about his or her culture and ethnic origin the child’s educational achievement will improve. The **second assumption**, closely related to the first, is that in learning about his or her own culture and traditions the child would improve his or her chances of equality of opportunity. The **third assumption** is that multicultural education is only for immigrants and minority groups, that learning about other cultures will reduce children’s and adults prejudice and discrimination towards those from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Bullivant, 1979). In his opinion the supporters’ claims about the effectiveness of multicultural education rested on dubious grounds, “…as such assumptions have become part of the rhetoric and conventional wisdom of multicultural education” (Bullivant, 1979, p.236). He questions this view because it rests on rhetoric and conventional wisdom rather than on systematically researched evidence about the claimed effects of multicultural approaches. In contrast to what might be called the cultural minority conception of multicultural education, is the more global conception that Hernandez (1989) analyses.
Hernandez (1989) identifies three basic assumptions underlying the concept of multicultural education. The **first assumption** is that it is increasingly important for political, social, educational and economic reasons to recognise that we live in a culturally diverse society. The development of skills for living in such a dynamic society is a continuous, legitimate and necessary part of the formal and informal educational process. Consequently, multicultural education can prepare pupils for life in the real world beyond the school setting, where they would encounter individuals and groups from cultures that differ from their own. Multicultural education is believed to be a preparation for life in a society in which a model citizen does not exist, a society where no particular group lives in a vacuum but all groups exist as part of an interrelated whole.

The **second assumption** is that multicultural education is for all pupils. A misconception exists in the USA, that multicultural education was intended primarily for minority–group pupils. This perception has been promoted by the educational policy, which has failed to recognise that the development of appropriate skills and attitudes for living in multicultural societies is as critical for the majority group as it is for the minority group. Because pupils, of necessity are required to exist in a culturally diverse society all pupils should be exposed to the same educational experiences that encourage the necessary competencies for doing so.

The **third assumption** is that multicultural education is synonymous with effective teaching. Effective teaching strategies assist pupils to acquire academic skills, ideas and information, develop values and social skills, and understand themselves, as well as their environment. Effective teaching also provides pupils with repertoires of powerful tools for the acquiring of education. Teachers are encouraged to acquire a deeper and broader understanding of pupils and to develop an expanded repertoire of strategies and techniques. Multicultural education emphasises high expectations, adaptation to accommodate individual learner differences and presentation of all subjects to all students. Consideration of socio-cultural dimensions in the teaching and learning process is central to issues of social effectiveness and educational reform.

Both Bullivant’s (1979) and Hernandez’s (1989) work in the field of multicultural education have provided a sound basis for the critical account in this thesis of the changing concepts that follow. Bullivant’s (1979) study describes a very simplistic justification for the introduction of multicultural education, whereas Hernandez’s (1989) work looks more closely at the importance of multicultural
education for politics, society, economics and the recognition of a culturally diverse society. Multicultural education is not limited to ethnic minorities and is equal to good teaching. Bullivant and Hernandez’s work in fact, has laid the foundation for and inspired later studies by Foster (1990) and Todd (1991) and subsequently, Ladson–Billings (1994); Nieto (1992); Gollnick and Chinn (1990); Gay (1983) and many more. These authors have drawn on the original assumptions that underpinned multicultural education and provided more significant insights dealing with the concepts of race, class, gender and oppression. Their work also considers equality and equity, social justice and human rights.

Each of these conceptions has different implications for South Africa. With the demise of apartheid, South Africa has been welcomed back into the global society and in order to interact in the global arena it is necessary to equip our learners with the skills to interact in a multicultural world. Hernandez’s (1989) conception of multicultural education would be more appropriate in South Africa as it would be necessary to educate our pupils to accept that we live in a culturally diverse society where it is imperative that we have the knowledge about other cultures as well as the ability to interact and coexist in a culturally diverse country. Teachers also have an important role to play by familiarizing themselves with the principles of a more global conception of multicultural education and also by employing effective teaching strategies that would promote the values stated in the Manifesto on Values in Education (2001). Hernandez (1989) speaks of high expectations and expanded opportunities in effective teaching, which are two of the principles that underpin Outcomes Based Education. Outcomes Based Education is the new paradigm adopted for South African education. In addition, she refers to multicultural education preparing learners for the real world. These values necessary for life in the real world may be found in our constitution.

The aims of the South African constitution are; to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental human rights; to improve the quality of life for citizens and free the potential of each person, to lay the foundations for a democratic and free society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law, to build a united and democratic South Africa that is able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations (GCID, 2005, p.2). The constitution expresses the nation’s social values and its expectations of the roles, rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic South Africa. The role of education is therefore to assist in the achievement of these aims. The more contemporary view of multicultural education as cited by theorists in the previous decade may be adapted and used to heal past
divisions. Multicultural education may also assist in fostering the right human values thereby achieving the aims of the constitution and the ongoing project of building a democratic citizenry that acknowledges and respects diversity.

The more global conception of multicultural education, involves more than knowledge about other cultures, it is educational transformation providing equal opportunities to all students and takes cognisance of politic, cultural diversity, ethnicity, and gender. This claim about multiculturalism refers to what has become the dominant conception in the closing decade of the twentieth century. Ethnic diversity is seen by multiculturalists as a positive element that elevates a nation and enables citizens to resolve personal and public problems, thereby providing opportunities for other cultures to be experienced (Foster, 1990).

3.4 Critique of Multicultural Education

The major goals of multicultural education are to provide students with cultural and ethnic alternatives, skills, attitudes and knowledge necessary to function within their ethnic culture, as well as in mainstream culture. In addition, multicultural education aims to reduce the pain and discrimination that members of some ethnic and racial groups experience within schools and society. The proponents of the global conception of multicultural education such as Nieto (1992) and Ladson Billings (1995) claim that multicultural education is designed for all.

Grant and Sleeter (1985) and Grant, Sleeter and Anderson (1989) have studied and analysed journal articles totalling two hundred, as well as sixty-eight books in the field of multicultural education, and have established that different terminology is used synonymously for multicultural education (Cohen, 1994).

Postmodern theory can contribute to the comprehension of the complexities of education in a multicultural society (i.e. multicultural education). In this regard postmodern researchers refer to postmodernism and its concern with rethinking culture and the power relations embodied in both cultural representations and material practices. Postmodern theorists claim that cultural representations and material practice are of particular significance for multicultural education, since it firstly offers an additional means by which to analyse and examine literature on school practice and distribution of culture and power in society. Secondly, the handling of difference and “otherness” is pivotal to any investigation
of the dynamics of social change, Postmodernism can contribute to multicultural educators’ discussion of these dynamics. With reference to the debate surrounding the “difference theory” versus the “deficit theory”, Nieto, (1992, p. 91) claims:

If students are perceived to be “deficient,” the educational environment will reflect no nonsense, back-to-basics, drill orientation. However, if they are perceived as intelligent and motivated young people with an interest in the world around them, the educational environment will tend to reflect an intellectually stimulating and academically challenging orientation.

Much of the literature on multicultural education concerns the implementation of practical solutions for specific social and educational problems adopted from a liberal tradition. Grant, Sleeter and Anderson (1986) following an analysis of sixty-eight books written on multicultural education from four countries, reported that the major part of the literature was written for classroom teachers. What is significant is that teachers are viewed as the primary agents of change. The two hundred articles that Grant and Sleeter (1989) analysed advocated an assimilationist approach. Furthermore, the review revealed that multicultural literature lacks a tight correspondence between ideas and practice. Although there are suggested educational goals, including curricula, instruction and school policy, most school practices are limited to curricula, which Gay (1983) and Hernandez (1989) among others argue are not ethnically and culturally relevant (Cohen, 1994).

If education is to be effective in working towards a non-racist society it would be necessary to go beyond just including all cultures in the curriculum and the educating of heterogeneous children to function in a heterogeneous society (Todd, 1990). Parekh (in Modgil, Verma, Mallich and Modgil, 1986) asserts that conservative critics perceive multicultural education as an attempt to politicise education in order to appease minority demands, while radical critics perceive multicultural education as an ideological device to perpetuate the racist exploitation of ethnic minorities. The above criticisms have prompted the move towards the establishment of a more oppositional form of pedagogy, that of anti-racist education.

### 3.5 Anti-racist Education

Multicultural education and anti-racist education differ profoundly in origin, philosophy, assumptions and goals. anti-racists maintain that while anti-racist education emerged from the struggle of racial minorities,
multicultural education arose from a liberal reformist understanding of racism (Rashti (1995); Carrington and Short (1989); Troyna (1993); Gillborn (1990). Of the anti-racist critics of the late 1980s and 1990s. Troyna has given the most critical discussion of multicultural education, asserting that the aim of anti-racist education is to truly achieve equality, justice and emancipation for minority students. Brandt (1986) contends that the aim of anti-racist education should be oppositional, thereby acknowledging the intention to oppose in the education system whatever exists to oppress and repress a group of pupils on totally unjustifiable grounds of perceived “difference” and assumptions of inherent inferiority. The anti-racist dismissal of multicultural education has force against the type of multicultural education that Bullivant (1979) describes but to a certain extent Hernandez’s discussion is encompassed in a number of anti-racist recommendations although they see their recommendations as a negation of multicultural assumptions.

In contrast to the early conception of multiculturalism, anti-racism rejects the notion that racism is primarily an individual problem; rather, anti-racists propose that racism is found in the structures and beliefs of everyday life (Troyna, 1993). Anti-racists recognise the importance of power relations associated with race, sex and class and argue that these should be exposed and challenged in a programmatic strategy of education. Central to the anti-racist paradigm is the need to provide the appropriate organisational, pedagogical and curricular context to enable children to examine the way in which racism rationalises and helps to maintain injustices and the differential power granted to particular class, ethnic and gender groups in society. Rashti (1995) asserts that true anti-racist education should concentrate on raising the awareness of racially dominated groups to their rights. No consensus has been reached to date on a universal model of anti-racist pedagogy and curriculum. anti-racist education is said to encompass a series of beliefs and practices that concern the role and nature of education in a culturally diverse society.

An explicit anti-racist perspective, according to Brandt (1986), has the advantage of challenging the racist mechanisms of exploitation that are located in the very structure of our society. Institutional racism is identified by anti-racists as racially discriminatory beliefs and practices. Apart from being legislation arising from white institutions, institutional racism becomes a reflection of assumptions, goals and values of the white ruling class Institutional racism was also an aspect under investigation for this study into historically white former Model C Schools. These schools would need to take cognisance of the fact that South Africa has entered the global arena since the 1994 elections and it would be necessary for them to
rid themselves of their parochial views and institutional racism that is still prevalent in many schools in South Africa. Assimilation, according to anti-racists, is at the heart of multicultural education.

3.5.1 The Assimilationist Perspective

It has been argued by many anti-racist educators that multicultural education is “assimilationist”. Thus a discussion of assimilation is essential here. Todd (1991) states that one of the major questions about schools as agents of change is concerned with schools as places which, both directly and indirectly, work towards the assimilation of ethnic minorities.

A simple explanation of assimilation is the adapting of the minority group to the culture of the majority. Giddens (1989) provides a definition of assimilation as “the acceptance of a minority group by a majority population, in which the group takes over the values and norms of the dominant culture” (Todd, 1991, p. 735).

Although there appears to be a hint of a two–way process, the emphasis in assimilation is upon the change within the minority group (Todd, 1991). Further, the minority group appears to change passively while the majority holds the power of tolerance or rejection, finally showing acceptance of the assimilated minority. Giddens (1989, p. 144) elucidates this as follows:

…it is a matter of common observation that cultural change among immigrants proceeds more rapidly in respect of behaviour that helps them to earn a living, like learning a language, than in their private domestic lives. The implication of a uniform process of change is misleading, as is the failure to acknowledge that the receiving group undergoes change in absorbing the other.

Giddens (1989, p. 144)

With assimilation there is change on both sides of the ethnic boundary but Giddens (1989) draws attention to the complexity of change. Although there might be an appearance of change in the way that immigrants may adopt the habits of the majority the deep–seated values and norms might not have changed. Furthermore, the majority itself is divided with regard to socio-economic status, religions, lifestyle and ethnicity. As a result social life in the different areas of work, school, home and religion may become compartmentalised, making it difficult for the minority to distinguish where they would be expected to assimilate (Banton, 1983 in Todd, 1991).
3.6 Anti-racist versus Multicultural Education

Modgil et al. (1988) claim that the term “multiculturalism” does not have a clear definition and that the implementation of the concept is dependent upon the viewpoint of individuals who may take an “assimilationist”, cultural pluralist or anti-racist approach towards cultural diversity. Parekh (1991, in Modgil et al., 1991) maintains that multicultural education has become a subject of acute controversy and anti-racists argue that multicultural education is “soft on racism” and reject the notion that racism is an individual problem (Gillborn, 1995, p. 53).

Significant criticism has been levelled against the liberal approach to multiculturalism referred to in Bullivant’s study, as well as that of cultural pluralists and assimilationist. The concerns about multicultural education appear to be focused on social control instead of social change associated with Bowles and Gintis’ (1976) “reproduction theory”. However, the transformative theorists Aronowitz and Giroux (1985); Apple (1982) and Freire (1974), see schools as social institutions where the development of critical thinking and radical ideas can take place. They maintain that state education has not significantly benefited the working–class children. This is obvious in South Africa where the apartheid education system used a curriculum to maintain the status quo of white supremacy during the apartheid era and education authorities are still battling with the legacy of apartheid ten years into democracy. It is essential for South Africa to be recognised in the international arena that our pupils are prepared for cultural diversity.

Antiracist educators perceive culture as a dynamic institution influenced by such elements as social class and gender, whereas multicultural education supporters perceive culture as a static institution. The academic failure of minority pupils according to the early proponents of multicultural education may be blamed predominantly on the home, cultural factors and, to a lesser degree, on the system (cultural deficit theory). Anti-racist education claims that even though social, economic and home factors cannot be ignored entirely, the failure of these pupils is a result of institutional racism (Gillborn, 1995).

Gillborn (1995) argues that social class and gender differences affect the life chances of minority–group children. One of the reasons is partly that multiculturalism tends to emphasise idealistic initiatives about society when they define culture to support an ethnic cultural maintenance of life–styles. Moreover, the early concepts of multiculturalism lacks the capacity to address pragmatic power conflict issues, as a result of race and class, by persuading minority children to discover about their heritage and culture, which
cannot contribute to equal educational opportunities and life chances. Multicultural education does not address the power relationships accountable for the exploitation of the minority groups. This has resulted in diverse moves towards the establishment of more active and opposing forms of education and curriculum based on anti-racism. Hernandez’s (1989) concept of multiculturalism though having leanings towards a global concept will be criticised considerably by anti-racists as she fails to mention power and power relations and does not offer any strategies to eradicate racism but merely mentions effective teaching to prepare pupils for the real world.

Brandt (1986) perceives any form of multicultural education as racist and refers to multicultural education as the “Trojan Horse” of institutional racism. He argues that in it lies an attempt to renew the structure and process of racism in education. Despite the extensive work conducted into racisms and ways and means to eradicate racism, racism remains a universal phenomenon as is evident in the many racial clashes in schools, as reported in the media in South Africa. Racism is not just confined to South Africa, particular race groups or particular circumstances, nor is racism only confined to schools. Anti-racism should be dynamic, led by the experience and articulation of the black community who are the perpetual victims of rapidly changing ideology and the practice of racism. Some critics identify the rationalist pedagogy as a weakness of existing anti-racist approaches. An excess of multiculturalism and an excess of anti-racism assume racism to be illogical and simply try to undermine its basis with reasoned arguments. Promoting multiculturalism or anti-racism excessively will not engage with the reality of students’ lives, in and out of school (Rattansi and Mc Donald, 1992).

Troyna (1995) questions the foundations of Rattansi and Mc Donald’s claims and as early as 1987 Cashmore rejected the portrayal of anti-racism as a “rationalist” project: anti-racist education projects are not designed to engage with the irrationalism of (young working class) people – they are concerned with providing them with alternative explanatory frameworks.

…providing pupils with the opportunity of perceiving things through an alternative and more plausible lens is likely to provoke changes in their racist construction of the way things are.

(Troyna, 1995, p.136)
3.7 Teaching in Multicultural Classrooms

Considerable research has been conducted in the area of teaching in multicultural classrooms in the UK, the USA, and Canada by Foster (1990), Gillborn (1990) Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) and Liston and Zeichner (1996) among others. Foster’s (1990) aim was to identify models of multicultural and anti-racist education to compare them to the policy and practice at the research school. Gillborn (1990) conducted his research specifically to assist in-service and pre-service teachers. In addition, he examined the experiences of Afro-Caribbean and Asian pupils in schools with predominantly white teachers. The expectations with regard to discipline ability and attitude also came under scrutiny. Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) examined relationships in schools, including inter-ethnic tension and conflict, racial prejudice and discrimination on the part of both teachers and pupils. Finally, Liston and Zeichner (1996) examined social conditions of schooling and personal beliefs about teaching and schooling. All the researchers mentioned teachers’ attitudes and problems in relation to pupils’ academic performance. Foster (1990) in particular, identified the fact that teachers’ initial perception of pupils influenced their expectations of the pupils’ future progress (as discussed under the self-fulfilling prophecy in the previous chapter). Closely related to the “self-fulfilling prophecy” is the stereotyping of pupils. Gillborn (1990) concludes that the beliefs of teachers who stereotype pupils are often not an accurate representation of culturally diverse pupils. Gillborn refers to the work of Sharp and Green (1975, in Gillborn, 1990) where it shows that teachers differentiate between pupils according to how closely the pupils meet certain assumptions of the “ideal client”. This construction derives from the lifestyle and culture of the teacher.

Professionals depend on their environing society to provide them with clients who meet the standards of their image of the ideal client. Social class,

…cultures among other factors may operate to produce many clients who, in one way or another, fail to meet these specifications and therefore aggravate one or another of the basic problems of the worker client relation…

(Gillborn, 1990, p. 26)

This quotation suggests that social-class factors are not the only factors affecting teachers’ “specifications” of the ideal client; ethnic differences may also influence teacher’s perceptions of their pupils. In a multicultural school teachers often encounter behavioural traits that may be foreign to them, and they interpret this strangeness as threatening in some way (Gillborn, 1990; Foster, 1990). Foster (1990) refers to Ball’s (1981) theory, which similar to Hargreaves (1994) concentrates on the link between
what he called “differentiation” and “polarisation”. “Differentiation” refers to the way that teachers evaluate their pupils in terms of the dominant values of the school at the informal classroom level as well as at the formal school level, through the schools system of ability streaming. “Polarisation” on the other hand, refers to the ways in which pupils adapt to the school as well as the emerging sub–cultures that are a reaction to “differentiation”. The theory argues that differentiation in schools, which is based on academic achievement and behavioural conformity, results in the polarisation of pupils’ attitudes.

3.7.1 Policies on Equal Opportunities, Anti-racism and Multicultural Education

In the nine schools that Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) studied they found that there were policies on equal opportunities, anti-racism and multicultural education in place. The white teachers believed that the policies were adequate, whereas ethnic minority teachers complained that these policies were vague and inadequate. Further, many ethnic minority teachers believed that the policy was just a “paper policy”, with no clear guidelines for implementation. Various means were used to formulate policies; some used the recommendations of the Local Education Authorities (LEA) and others used working groups to formulate policies. Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) found that the policies that were formulated by the management and staff produced a more positive and supportive attitude among staff. The views held by staff members with regard to policy were varied and ranged from very positive to very negative. A particular black teacher believed that policy had done nothing to change the negative expectations that some white teachers had of black pupils.

3.7.2 Teachers’ Professional Development and Inter-Cultural Knowledge

Initial teacher training, according to the Swann Report (DES, 1985), should include opportunities for teachers to experience educational issues in a multicultural society, such as Britain. This would enable them to address the needs of minority pupils and be equipped to recognise cultural diversity in their teaching (Verma, Zec and Skinner, 1994). Liston and Zeichner (1996) argue that prospective teachers need to be prepared to work in culturally diverse environments. They claim that many teacher–education programmes focus on instructional methodology and the psychology of the pupil. The authors agree that these are important elements and cannot be ignored, but they also maintain that it is necessary to prepare teachers for the reality of the social conditions in schools.

In–Service Education and Training (INSET) is provided in most schools in the UK because it is policy. However, Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) found that in most schools INSET tended to be based on
departmental need and curriculum–related issues, and that only in some schools were aspects of cultural diversity and multicultural education included. In other schools that Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) researched they found that a limited number of teachers had attended school–based INSET courses on multicultural education. Many of the teachers interviewed in Verma, Zec and Skinner’s (1994) study expressed the need for INSET. Overall, teachers believed that, as a result of the pressure around academic issues, multicultural issues were not being dealt with adequately. In addition, Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) found that schools did not have adequate knowledge about their intakes, had few ethnic–minority teachers, and teachers were inadequately prepared to work in a culturally diverse setting. They concluded that none of the research schools were suitable for multiethnic education and sound inter-ethnic relationships. Similarly in the majority of historically white Model C schools in South Africa despite the demographics having changed among the pupil population the teaching staff remain predominantly white.

3.7.3 Inter-cultural Knowledge Equality and Relationships

Teachers in Verma, Zec and Skinner’s (1994) research study interpreted inter-cultural knowledge in terms of information about difference. Many ethnic–minority pupils claimed to know more about other cultures than others knew about theirs. Teachers also emphasised the fact that parental influence and community factors played an important role in inter-cultural relationships in school. Liston and Zeichner (1996) argue that teaching, learning and culture are inseparable and if teachers choose to ignore the cultural heritage and knowledge of their pupils their communication will fail and so will their pupils. The teachers who were sympathetic, knowledgeable and sensitive to cultural diversity had gained their attitudes and knowledge from life experience and not from professional development in the form of INSET. Generally, teachers confessed that they had little knowledge of their pupils’ backgrounds (Verma, Zec and Skinner, 1994).

3.7.4 Sociability, Indifference and Hostility

Although this study did not set out to examine inter- and intra-ethnic sociability it is relevant to discuss these issues because they have an effect on teaching and learning in culturally diverse classrooms. In addition, it is necessary to look at the kinds of abuse between pupils from culturally diverse backgrounds, as well as teachers’ attitudes and responses in these situations. Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) found that girls and boys generally drew their friends from the same ethnic group. Although pupils that they
interviewed spoke about close friendships with other groups the researchers in that study believed that close friendships are not necessarily indicative of the quality of inter-ethnic relationships in school.

The researchers in Verma, Zek and Skinner’s (1994) study interviewed both teachers and pupils about the reasons why inter-cultural mixing was limited. Pupils spoke about age and school organisation as the negative factors. Teachers believed that communal segregation outside school influenced friendship patterns. Asian and Afro-Caribbean pupils also expressed their reluctance to mix for fear of racist hostility on the part of white boys. White pupils, on the other hand, were of the opinion that Asians were reluctant to mix because of peer pressure to remain in their own groups. Some teachers believed that it was not an issue if pupils chose their friends from their own ethnic groups, whereas other teachers felt that interaction between groups was important for school life in general. One teacher referred to “herding”, where students of a particular ethnic group gathered together. This tendency, according to the teachers, was threatening to other pupils and teachers because many white teachers and pupils believed that if Afro-Caribbean pupils formed groups they could find “power” in numbers often seen as sub-cultures.

Gillborn (1990) refers to the term “sub-culture” and explains that there is no universal definition. Becker (1961, in Gillborn, 1990) and his colleagues provide an understanding of student culture and isolated a number of features that constitute a sub-culture. “A group of two or more people interacting extensively and sharing a common situation (role or problem) which served as the basis for the development of a body of collective understandings” (in Gillborn, 1990; Becker et al., 1961 pp. 46-7). In other words, the term sub-culture involves rules that develop and govern interaction within groups and may be defined as follows:

Intensive interaction of people who share common situations (role or problems) and develop a body of collective understandings and agreements including shared goals and values (a group perspective) modes of co–operation group norms/rules of behaviour.

(Gillborn, 1990, p. 47)

Attempts were made to enforce inter-ethnic mixing in class and during drama and sport activities; however, this was not very successful. The researchers recommend that schools should be sensitive to the causes of intra–ethnic groupings (Verma, Zec and Skinner 1994). Inter-ethnic abuse is common in most culturally diverse schools in the UK. What Foster (1990), Gillborn (1990) and Verma, Zec and Skinner (1994) found in their research was that there was considerable hostility among pupils. Verma, Zec and Skinner (1990) in particular found that verbal abuse and name-calling were particularly common in what
they call “student’s inhumanity to student”. Race and colour was the most common aspect of verbal abuse, followed closely by pupils’ looks and physical features. According to these researchers:

…verbal abuse, which puts a person into a category and abuses the category as well as the person, is likely to be doubly hurtful to the person. Membership of an ethnic and/or religious and/or linguistic minority therefore furnishes ample opportunities for that double hurt to be felt.

(Verma, Zec and Skinner, 1994, p. 93)

Most minority pupils reported that name-calling was abhorrent and that it angered them, whereas some ethnic majority pupils “just shrugged it off”. The researchers found that there was considerable patience and resignation among the minority pupils with regard to verbal abuse. They also found that some pupils believed that teachers were unaware of the name-calling, while other pupils reported that teachers reprimanded pupils guilty of racial verbal abuse. However, there were also reports of teachers’ indifference to racial and verbal abuse. Then there were the pupils who chose to deal with the problem themselves by fighting and beating up the perpetrators because they believed that teachers were unconcerned.

3.8 Culturally Diverse Schools in South Africa

The above discussion on anti-racist education and multicultural education offers significant possibilities for South African education. However, there are those South African educationists who argue that multicultural education is “a site of political contestation in the Gramscian sense” (in Moore, 1994, p. 252) of hegemony, and reject multicultural education as being dangerous and risky.

Moore (1994) encountered strong opposition to multicultural education in his study conducted in South Africa in the early 1990s. The majority of the respondents saw multicultural education as being too close to the apartheid form of education that used “cultural difference” as its ideological foundation. It is interesting to note that the Africans Moore (1994) interviewed voiced strong opposition to multicultural education whilst their white counterparts were in favour. This passionate opposition that Moore describes was in response to the ideological state apparatus in the form of apartheid education. If multicultural education is unacceptable in South Africa could anti-racist education be the alternative?
The language of anti-racism is powerful and includes the following terms: “conflict”, “oppression”, “fragmentation” (divide and rule), “racism”, “power structure” and “struggle” (Brandt, 1986). The process of anti-racist education should be described thus: dismantle, deconstruct, reconstruct. Anti-racist terminology is currently in vogue in the new South Africa and has become very evident in most government documentation. On examination of current government documentation and legislation the terminology examples which are quoted above is evident. An example of the use of this terminology may be found in the preamble to the Draft White Paper on Higher Education dated 18 April 1998:

promote the redress of past discrimination and ensure representativeness; promote the values which underlie an open and democratic society based on freedom and equality respect and encourage democracy, academic freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, artistic creativity, scholarship and research; pursue excellence, combat discrimination, promote full realisation of the potential of every student and employee, tolerance of ideas and appreciation of diversity.


In an attempt to eradicate racism in the classroom it is necessary to draw on the results of international research. It is important to examine both multicultural education and anti-racist education and decide what lessons could be learned from both and what could be adapted for use in South African classrooms. It has been discovered that multiculturalism has done very little to improve the lives of blacks and minority groups in Britain. In the light of Moore’s (1994) research findings where subjects passionately opposed multiculturalism, anti-racist education could be explored as a possible alternative. In addition, the above discussion highlights significant possibilities for South African education. South Africa needs an emancipatory paradigm to rid it of the legacy of an oppressive education system, which will assist the disadvantaged majority.

Christie (1992) highlights a number of pertinent issues relating to the racially diverse classroom in open schools. They state that despite socialisation in private schools these schools have failed to override gender and racial or political responses. Black pupils in these schools claimed greater benefits from racial mixing than did their white counterparts. Blacks also claimed to have gained more insights into “white ways” than whites into “black ways”.

The way in which schools adapt to increased integration is critical. Some schools have embraced the changes that integration has brought and are experimenting with new approaches to deal with racial diversity in the classroom. However, a number of schools are guilty of discriminatory actions (Naidoo,
Two schools notably the Ben Viljoen Hoerskool in Vryburg and a school in Potgietersrus were featured in the media and accused of discriminatory practices against African pupils.

It is important that a policy is in place to prevent the occurrence of serious racist incidents in our schools. Racist incidents are common in most inner-city comprehensive schools in the UK. According to Troyna and Hatcher (1992), racist incidents reached alarming proportions when a white pupil at Burnage High in Manchester murdered an Asian pupil in 1989. Although such incidents are rare, harassment is a way of life for black and Asian pupils in the UK. Very rarely are pupils from ethnic minorities found to form strong bonds of friendship with white pupils. Pupils of diverse cultures attending historically all white schools in South Africa encounter racist incidents as well. Teachers are unable to handle these situations adequately although racially diverse school populations are a decade old, teachers still require assistance.

3.9 Summary

This chapter covered the advantages and disadvantages of multicultural education as well as the numerous criticisms levelled against this concept. Then followed an in-depth discussion of anti-racism, details of the ongoing debate about multiculturalism and anti-racism and, finally, a discussion of the South African scenario in terms of racially integrated classrooms. This study endeavoured to examine teaching and learning in culturally diverse classrooms in historically white former Model C schools. Inter-cultural mixing and sociability, as well as teacher reactions to the diversity of cultures are common features in any study of this nature therefore the lengthy discussion of these phenomena in this chapter. The main themes that emerged quite strongly from this literature review were assimilation, change, power related to social control, the deficit theory, hostility and integration, among other themes. In the analysis of the raw data I will attempt to identify these themes as they emerge. The next chapter presents a comprehensive description of the methods employed to collect the data for this study. I also provide elaborate descriptions of the sites where the data was collected, as well as descriptions of the participants from the three sites.