
PART I “*Setting the Scene*”

Chapter One :

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

“The golden journey begins”.

(Delamont, 1994, p. 53)

The year 1999 in which this study commenced was exactly five years after the first democratic elections in South Africa and the opening of schools to all children regardless of race. Private schools in and around Johannesburg had admitted pupils from across the racial divide as early as the mid 1970s (Cohen, 1994). However, historically white former Model C schools became racially diverse only after the 1994 democratic elections. Even now, in 2004, black pupils who are admitted to historically ‘White’ schools are still perceived as intruders and these pupils often have to contend with racist remarks, insults, humiliation and harassment. Of course, the reverse is probably the case in schools that now have a small minority of ‘White’ pupils.

Early in 1998, racial clashes at an historically white school in Vryburg were widely reported in the media. According to the press, the school’s management did nothing to prevent this overt display of racism, instead, they temporarily closed the school. The racist incidents, violence and discourtesy displayed at the school in Vryburg may be described as “action racism” (Garcia, 1993). Yet another racist attack on two black boys in Linpark Secondary School, in Kwa Zulu Natal, by white teachers and white pupils was reported. The principal of the school refused to comment, while the local Department of Education shrugged the attack off as a school matter. The victims’ parents took the principal’s silence as condonation of racist behaviour. These are only two of many incidents reported in the press over the last five years. The manner in which these incidents were dealt with by School Management and the particular Departments of Education, provides anecdotal evidence that there may be a lack of the necessary knowledge to deal adequately with inter-racial conflict among pupils, in multicultural settings. While these incidents of racism suggest a need for extensive and in-depth studies of school ethos, this is not a matter I undertake here but it has actually prompted this study of how teachers and pupils experience racial diversity in schools. Although racism itself was not the primary focus of this research, it was both a motivating factor and a key finding.

The aim of this study was to investigate teaching and learning in racially diverse classrooms in historically 'White' former Model C schools. Since the issue of race and racism is bound to emerge in a study such as this, my work can assist towards illuminating areas where the need for further investigation exists. With the opening of schools to all South Africans I was attracted by the need to conduct a study of this nature. Racially/culturally diverse classrooms are relatively new in South Africa and in order to keep abreast with global trends in education it is imperative that we conduct our own research.

As the title implies, my research concerned the convergence of race and culture in school settings. How the two categories are related is a complex matter, dependent both on context and on how race and culture are conceptualised. I consider conceptual issues in Chapter Two. With reference to context, in South Africa race has played, and continues to play, a critical role in the formation of culture. During the apartheid era the population was divided into four racial categories: African, Indian Coloured and White. Racial categories were constantly reformed and redefined by the apartheid government by, "invoking a mixture of scientific and new, or cultural, racism, to justify its policies" (Dolby, 2001, p. 10). In order to maintain and consolidate white power and control, the apartheid government positioned race in a number of contradictory ways. The Population Registration Act is an example of this contradiction where it was purported to have used "scientific" criteria to distinguish racial categories. The Population Registration Act "defined two of the races – White and Coloured – by skin colour; one – Native – by country of origin and the fourth one – Asian – by continent of origin" (Manzo, 1992, p. 37). Additionally, inconsistencies in apartheid rhetoric and policies were evident in the separation of Africans by language and culture while whites who have various countries of origin and languages were identified as a single population group (Dolby, 2001).

During the 1960s and 1970s, in order to keep abreast with international trends, South Africa adopted the notion of cultural pluralism and self-determination thus justifying its policy of separate development. In addition, it was a common occurrence during the apartheid era to conflate "biological" race and culture. Race is often cited as a determinant of academic success and ability, discipline and acceptance in racially/culturally diverse classrooms in South Africa today, despite the democratic rights of each individual. In recent years, together with the discourse of biological race is that of "new racism". It is not just the reliance on biological ideas of difference but on "new racism" which "invokes immutable essential cultural differences" (Dolby, 2001, p.10). This discourse of "new racism" is preferable because race is referred to through the use of coded terminology and is not named directly. Instead of referring to

biological race the individual relies on patriotism to make a racial point. Race has also been coded as culture and by race being coded as culture it is not directly named this was evident in Thatcher's Britain (Dolby, 2001). The notion of "new racism" is dealt with in more detail later in the thesis.

1.1 Nature of the Study

This multiple case study of three historically 'White' former Model C schools in a District of the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) scrutinises the dynamics of racial diversity in teaching and learning in Grade 8 classes. The study is located in the field of teaching, multicultural education and anti-racism. Initially the purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' experiences in racially diverse classrooms and, more specifically, their management of these classrooms. However, during the course of the fieldwork it became evident that it was necessary to take cognisance of pupils' perceptions and experiences as well. Thus, to obtain a more holistic picture of the situation as it pertains in the three selected schools, pupils were also interviewed and observed. After including pupils in this study my intention was to illuminate the challenges, attitudes and emotions experienced by teachers and pupils in racially/culturally diverse classrooms, as well as the dynamics between teachers and pupils, and among pupils.

1.2 Central Questions

To this end I address the following questions:

1. What are the experiences and challenges of teachers and pupils in racially /culturally diverse classrooms?
2. How do teachers and pupils respond to these experiences and challenges?
3. What preparation, if any, have teachers had in order to face these challenges in racially/culturally diverse classrooms?
4. How do teachers and pupils, and pupils and pupils, from the diverse race groups interact?
5. What are teachers' and pupils' opinions about racially diverse classrooms?

Since race was an issue that pupils raised the following additional questions emerged during the data collection phase:

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6. What is the significance of race to pupils at the three schools?
 7. How is race conceptualised and lived at school?
 8. What is the impact of the discourse of race on the lives of black pupils?

1.3 The Focus, Scope and Limits of the Study

Teaching is a challenging profession, especially for many South African teachers who were trained in “own-race” institutions during the apartheid era. Legislated segregation ensured that the various race groups attended their own schools and higher education institutions. As a result there was little or no interaction between white and black pupils, or among the different, black groups, namely, African, Indian and Coloured pupils. With the opening of schools to all race groups under a democratic government, in many cases, members of these groups encountered each other perhaps for the first time.

Much of the school-based research on racial diversity in the classroom has focused on the specific relationship between the school as an institution, and the actors located within the school/site (Dolby, 2001; Soudien, 1998). My research provided a critical context for studying pupils’ and teachers’ participation within the context of racial diversity. The unique ethnic composition of African, Coloured, Indian, Taiwanese and Vietnamese at the three schools, as well as the dynamics of demographics, provides the environment for compelling anecdotes of the impact of racial and ethnic diversity on the classroom. Of course, no matter how compelling the anecdotes may be, they do not constitute systematic research which underpinned this study.

Invariably in a study of this nature a researcher encounters a number of limitations. In this case, time was a constraint and, as a result, the observations in each class were limited. The time spent at each site was also curtailed because of my responsibilities at work, which allowed me only short periods of leave time. I was unable to spend continuous extended periods on site as I had previously intended. For this reason the data collection spanned two years. The actual writing of the thesis also took much longer than anticipated. When I collected the data, I was not in a position to foresee the hurdles that would impede my progress such as a heart attack and subsequent open heart surgery. Nonetheless, the time lapse between the collection of the data and the writing up of the thesis does not in any way impair the central line of argument.

I focused on Grade 8 pupils who were newcomers to the schools, and whose impressions had hopefully not been tainted by the older pupils who had been at the school for a longer period. I had hoped that these new pupils would be able to express their own views and experiences. I also interviewed the Grade 8 teachers who had contact with these pupils through teaching them. Another limitation of the study is that it focused only on one grade and it is possible, therefore, that the study is not generalisable across each of the study sites let alone all state schools country wide. However, on a more positive note, limiting the scope to three schools afforded me the opportunity to conduct a more in-depth study. My own race (classification as 'Indian' during the apartheid era) appeared to be a limitation since it was difficult to establish whether remarks were made to me specifically because of my race.

1.4 Rationale for the Study

1.4.1 My Personal *Raison d'être*

The topic for this study emerged from my experience as a teacher in both Indian and Coloured schools that admitted African pupils towards the late 1980s and early 1990s, during the apartheid era. My teacher-training was completed through a distance education institution, with my teaching practice in a so-called 'Indian' institution. As a result, I had very little knowledge or experience of working with racial/cultural diversity.

Subsequently, while studying in the United Kingdom (UK) I discovered the extensive literature available on multicultural and anti-racist education, which contributed towards my deeper understanding of teaching in culturally diverse classrooms. My interest in the field of multicultural education was further aroused by my interaction with pupils from diverse cultures in inner city schools in Birmingham in the UK while I was studying for my Masters Degree. Students were required, as part of their coursework for the Masters Degree in Education, to visit inner city schools. I recall my first encounter in an inner city comprehensive school in a working class area of Birmingham. I was faced with a class of predominantly 'white' pupils, the majority of whom came from single-parent families in an area where the unemployment rate was high. These children were noisy, badly behaved, arrogant, and aggressive. There was little motivation for pupils to attend school, apart from the fear of getting into trouble with the truant authorities.

I began my talk by describing the education system in South Africa and told the class about the segregated education system, and managed to get them interested enough to keep quiet. However, as I looked around the class I could read the looks that told me these pupils were not really interested. I had prepared carefully for this talk and had tried to make it as interesting and lively as possible, but no matter what I said I could do nothing to capture the pupils' interest. The feelings that surfaced that day are similar to those feelings that teachers report in the Chapters Five, Six and Seven of this thesis. I questioned my ability as a teacher and I could feel my self-esteem plummet; I felt intimidated by these children.

Subsequently, the following week, I visited another inner city comprehensive girls' school in Handsworth, also in Birmingham. This area is inhabited predominantly by Asians (Sikhs, Pakistanis, North Indians, a few South Indians, Sri Lankans and some West Indians). The Headmistress was Indian and the school had a number of Indian teachers on the staff. I immediately began to relax. The girls were well behaved, quiet and attentive. I felt quite comfortable in these surroundings and I could feel my self-esteem resurface.

When I addressed the pupils they listened attentively and raised their hands to ask questions. At the end of my talk the pupils approached me to find 'pen-pals' for them in South Africa. I left that school feeling elated and, similar to one of the teachers that I had interviewed in one of the schools, I believed that the pupils had related well to me because I was of the 'same kind'.

Yet again my interest in multicultural education surfaced and, with Nelson Mandela's release in February 1990, I knew there would be radical changes in South Africa, especially in education. The idea of conducting a study of this nature was already germinating in my mind. On my return to South Africa the historically white schools began admitting pupils from the various racial/cultural groups and I realised that the opportunity was here to conduct my study. I read extensively about both multicultural as well as anti-racist education and the more I read the more excited I became, knowing that this was valuable literature for the future. It was inevitable that there would be major changes in education.

Segregated schooling was all that the previous government had provided for South Africans in state schools. The private schools, although open to all race groups, had only a few children of colour, specifically those who could afford to attend private schools (Christie, 1992). I anticipated that if South

African schools became integrated there were many lessons to be learnt from studies on multicultural and anti-racist education from the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, and Canada.

On my return to South Africa in 1991, the HoR (Coloured Education Department) school where I taught admitted a number of African pupils from the neighbouring black townships and these pupils, together with the teachers, began to experience numerous problems. The African pupils had entered this school from a disadvantaged schooling system, which lagged behind academically. It was a challenge for us (the teachers) to bring the African pupils up to the level of the Coloured pupils. Most of us struggled, and I recall how we complained that we were despondent, frustrated and ready to resign at times. That further confirmed my resolve to conduct a study of this nature.

I subsequently left secondary school teaching and joined the staff of a university where the student population was predominantly African. I wanted my students who had come from a poor schooling system to experience a 'good' school system and I arranged for them to be placed in historically white former Model C schools for their teaching practice (the same three schools where this study was conducted). My experience as a lecturer in teacher education confirmed my belief that teachers should be given the knowledge and training to work in racially/culturally diverse classrooms. This belief was endorsed by many of the 'self-reflection' assignments that students submitted on their return from teaching practice. These assignments revealed students' feelings of inadequacy, lack of confidence and frustration. They also felt intimidated because they were black students who had to face a classroom of predominantly white pupils, something that I could identify with.

As racial integration in South Africa is only ten years old it is relevant that a study of this nature be conducted to emphasise the areas in education that require attention. A number of studies were conducted during the late 1970s up until the early 1990s by South African researchers like Christie (1993), Freer (1993), Naidoo (1996), and Cohen (1994). However, all these studies were conducted in "Open Schools" (private schools). More recent studies were conducted by Dolby (2001) and Soudien (1998) in historically white former Model C schools, but these studies investigated "social identity" specifically. This study, by examining contextual issues of schooling/education in racially diverse classrooms, is important for both practising and prospective teachers. In addition, I anticipated that the study would enable teachers and pupils to articulate their ideas, beliefs, theories and feelings about racial diversity in the classroom, and enable me to raise further discussions around the discourse of racial diversity.

Additionally, Freer (1993) discusses the impact that segregated education has had on the experience of teachers and rightly asserts that a limited number of teachers will have had experience in working in non-segregated classrooms prior to democracy. As a result of colleges of education being segregated in the past, newly qualified teachers had neither experience nor guidance in what Freer (1993) terms “multicultural teaching”. He sees teachers as capable of playing a pivotal role in the reconstruction of society by creating learning climates that are tolerant, purposeful, and lead to the promotion of harmony, irrespective of colour. The onus is thus upon lecturers in South African universities and colleges to inculcate the attitudes and enthusiasm that are essential in order for the country to progress towards an integrated democratic society. Although the South African democracy is ten years old, extensive research on education and racial integration is necessary as South Africa is still grappling with difficulties that originated during the past. For this reason it is anticipated that this study, despite its limited scope, will illuminate the major issues found to be problematic in racially diverse classrooms. Of particular concern for this study is teaching and learning in racially diverse classrooms, as well as the manner in which discourse constructs, deconstructs, and reconstructs racial positions. Subsequent to the 1994 democratic elections it was evident that education had to transform in line with democratic policies and values. What makes this a critical study is the withdrawal of the apartheid education policy and the implementation of education reform in the period after 1994.

1.4.2 Education Reform since 1994

Prior to democracy, education in South Africa was divided along racial lines. A transformed education system underpinned by the principles of equity was introduced, and changed education from a racially differentiated system to one that was determined by geography. Traditionally, education was examination driven, and adhered to a content-based syllabus. Apart from being racially based the previous education system also lacked input from pupils and the parent community, and thus lacked the elements necessary for successful modern education which are: “equity, access, redress and quality assurance” (Van Wyk, 1999, p. 1). The developments education has undergone are set out in White Papers and the Education Act, where the South African Constitution has been used as a benchmark for all the changes that were effected in education.

Commissions were appointed to investigate a variety of educational issues, and these commissions presented their findings to the Minister of Education. The reports compiled by the commissions were presented in the form of White/Green Papers for comment by the public and Members of Parliament.

White Paper 1 on Education and Training (RSA, 1995a: 21-23) was the initial policy document that paved the way for a new period in education in South Africa and outlines the proposals for a transformed education system in South Africa. Education White Paper 2 entitled, “The organisation, governance and funding of schools” (February, 1996) was based on the Hunter Report, which highlighted the role of governing bodies, parents, and the community in education and removed the focus from the teacher, as the person solely responsible for the education of the child. In 1996 the National Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996) was published in the Government Gazette (February 1996). This Act places education squarely in the hands of the Minister of Education. The South African Schools Act (Act No 84 of 1996) was informed by White Paper 2 and specifies: compulsory education where the onus is upon parents to send their children to school from age seven until they reach Grade nine. There are two categories of schools, independent and public schools make up the two categories. The Act also stipulates the election of school governing bodies for the governance of the school’s funding in state schools.

As a result of the intense transformation that has taken place in education historically white institutions have needed to transform with regard to redress and equity. Since historically white former Model C schools have become racially diverse, transformation corresponding to the Education Act of 1996 is necessary and it is against this backdrop that this study was conducted.

1.4.3 Existing Local Research

There is an abundance of literature on multicultural education and anti-racist education in the UK, the USA, Canada, and Australia, where comprehensive empirical and theoretical work has been conducted in schools and universities. However, because of the apartheid policy in South Africa where education was segregated along racial lines, there are serious gaps in the literature and research on multicultural education locally.

A number of studies were conducted during the 1980s and 1990s in private schools. Although these studies have provided valuable insights into racial diversity in these private schools, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the black pupils who attended private schools during that time did so out of choice and had the economic resources to attend these schools. To reiterate, in-depth case studies into school integration were conducted primarily in open schools (private schools) during the 1970s and the 1980s since state schools were still segregated at the time although some Indian and Coloured schools had

admitted African pupils as early as the late 1980s (See for example, Bot, 1987; Christie, 1993; Naidoo, 1995).

Carrim and Sayed (1991) discuss the opening of white schools to all races pointing out that it could pave the way for a single non-racial education system. However, in a later piece, Carrim (1995) looks more specifically at race and ethnicity. Teacher education for a democratic education has been addressed in a number of articles; for example, Bodenstein (1996); Morrow (1996); Fraser (1992a). De-racialisation debates up to 1992 are covered by Morrell (1991) and provide an overview of the de-racialisation of education.

An impressive study of youth and identity formation in contemporary post-apartheid South Africa was conducted by Dolby (2001) Soudien's (1996) doctoral dissertation examined the relationships between experiences in schools and perceptions of racial identity in South Africa. Soudien (1998) also charts the experiences of African children in a Coloured school in Cape Town. The work of Vally and Dalamba (1999) look specifically at racial integration and desegregation in South African public schools. Although these studies are of considerable importance to education in South Africa, they differ from my study with regard to focus. My study focuses on teaching and learning in racially integrated classrooms. There remains a gap in literature with regard to teaching and learning in historically white former Model C schools in a democratic South Africa.

In the South African resources found limited mention is made of anti-racist education, which is an important aspect of education research in the United Kingdom and the United States and could have significance for us in South Africa. Carrim (1995) is the only writer who refers to anti-racism. Because of South Africa's protracted history of segregated schooling prior to 1994, multicultural education was not an issue of importance to the education authorities. The education authorities did not view South Africa as a multicultural society but rather as a country in which there were a number of different race groups. The various race groups were educated separately. Consequently, South Africa lags far behind the USA Canada, Australia and the UK in research into multicultural and anti-racist education. It benefits South Africa that countries such as the UK, the USA, and Canada and Australia have conducted such in-depth research into multicultural education. We can learn from their experience and adapt some of the appropriate recommendations made in these countries for our own use in South Africa.

Additionally, because of our protracted history of racially segregated education there are significant differences between our education system and those of the UK, the USA, Canada, and Australia. In South Africa, the black racial group is in the majority; however, it was ruled by a minority and legislation discouraged integration.

Considering that most of the local research on integration in historically white schools was conducted in private schools there is a need for such research to be conducted in state schools. Not only is integration important but the discourse of racial diversity needs to be illuminated through extensive research for this reason, this study could, despite its limitations, pave the way for far more elaborate studies to be conducted. It will certainly contribute towards an understanding of teachers' and pupils' experiences of racial diversity in South African classrooms.

1.5 Outline of Thesis

This thesis has two parts consisting of ten chapters. **Part One** is entitled “**Setting the Scene**” and comprises Chapters One to Four. These chapters introduce the research context and present a review of relevant concepts, literature, and the methods used in the data collection for the study. **Part Two**, entitled “**The Scene Unfolds**”, presents the research findings and the conclusions derived from the research. An outline of each of the chapters in both parts is presented below.

Chapter One introduces the reader to the study and highlights its purpose and nature. The field in which the study is located is presented in this chapter and the main problem that was investigated is discussed. Chapter One also presents the aims and main research questions of the study. The focus, scope and limits of the study are given and I provide my rationale for conducting this study. In addition, a brief overview of the post-1994 political arena and policy context is examined. I draw attention to existing local research and literature and identify one of the gaps where research still needs to be conducted.

The clarification of relevant concepts, which underpin the research, is found in **Chapter Two** (concepts in the field of multicultural and anti-racist education). **Chapter Three** begins by locating the concepts of multicultural education within the broader discourse of education. An in-depth discussion of multicultural and anti-racist education is presented followed by a critique of multicultural education in order that we do not accept multicultural education as the answer to all problems relating to racially diverse/integrated

classrooms. Together, these two chapters present the theoretical setting against which this thesis developed.

The methodological framework and research techniques utilised during the course of the research are presented in **Chapter Four**. This study comprised multiple case studies situated in the qualitative research paradigm. I also present my justification for my choice of methodology. Various diagrammatical representations have been included to clarify certain aspects of the research methodology discussed. The final discussion in this chapter deals with the issues of validity reliability and transferability.

Part Two begins with a discussion of change as experienced by teachers in the three historically white former Model C schools where the study was conducted. Change emerges as a central theme in this thesis. Teachers draw considerable attention to their predicament as they saw it, of having to teach in racially/culturally diverse classrooms. Teachers' complaints are underpinned by their subjective reality and their ability to cope with change. These discussions are covered in **Chapter Five**. Insights into the views of teachers about the cultural and racial diversity in their classes are also found in Chapter Five. A topic that was illuminated in this chapter is the teachers' perceived ability and actual ability to deal with racially integrated classrooms. The principal categories that emerged from the analysis of the data were change and subjective reality, clarity, un-clarity, and painful un-clarity. Change features prominently throughout the five chapters on the findings of this study.

Teachers' perceptions of the diverse racial and cultural backgrounds of pupils are covered in **Chapter Six**, as well as pupils' (from culturally/racially diverse backgrounds) perceptions of teachers. The themes of language, language and power, assimilation and discipline emerge from the analysis of the data and they are presented in Chapter Six. At times I also allude to the themes from the previous chapter, themes of subjective reality, clarity, un-clarity and painful un-clarity. Both teachers' and pupils' views obtained from interviews, observations and discussions are presented here. I present the intricacies of attitudes, emotions, beliefs and perceptions in the description and analysis in this chapter and, as a backdrop to all these discussions, the issue of change and teachers and pupils' perceptions of racially diverse classrooms is set out.

Home culture versus school culture is the main topic of **Chapter Seven**. Social class is a major theme in this chapter in its presentation of the discourse of blame and cultural deficit. In their reference to black

pupils' backgrounds teachers locate the basis of their (black pupils) problems in cultural and educational backgrounds. Accommodation and assimilation as common themes in teachers' discussions of their (African) pupils are the other themes discussed in Chapter Seven.

Teacher and pupil interaction and the dynamics of racially integrated classrooms are considered in **Chapter Eight**, where the themes of colour-blindness, favouritism and stereotypes that emerged very strongly from the analysed data are discussed. In addition, I cover the labelling theory and self-fulfilling prophecy quite extensively in this chapter. Racism is a major theme covered in **Chapter Nine**. Sub-themes of name-calling and hostility feature strongly in this chapter as well. Pupils' social identity is an issue that is dealt with at length here as there are a number of black pupils who are amenable to assimilation while many are not.

It is obvious from the findings of this study that tensions exist between the teachers and pupils as a result of teachers' perceptions of pupils from culturally/racially diverse backgrounds and the pupils' perceptions of their white teachers. The discussions in Chapter Nine form the foundation for the analysis of responses and through an analysis of the varied responses of pupils and teachers that the tensions are thoroughly examined. Insights into the views of pupils and teachers about the challenges of cultural diversity and how to deal with these as well as the extent to which the schools meet the needs of both teachers and pupils are highlighted in the five chapters of Part Two. I observed the schools in question to ascertain to what extent they approximate the integration, assimilation or transformation model of multicultural education and the results of the observation are set out in this chapter.

In **Chapter Ten** I present my conclusions on the basis of the research findings. I also attempt to concentrate on the main themes relating to racial/cultural diversity that emerged in the various chapters. Considering that these were three case studies conducted in three separate schools, the chapter considers the extent to which the findings of this study may be of value to teachers, researchers and policy makers for future studies in cultural diversity in schools. In this final chapter, I make recommendations for further research.

1.6 Summary

In this chapter I have accomplished three distinct tasks. I presented briefly the main elements of part one of the thesis, I outlined the key themes and arguments contained in chapters five to nine and I refer to my conclusions as well some of the questions that arise from the research. In addition, I refer to the opportunities for further research in the field of cultural diversity. The next chapter looks specifically at the clarification of concepts relating to the study as a whole.