Handling cultural diversity in education in South Africa
C Meier & C Hartell

University of South Africa
Meierc@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

For more than a decade South African education has been characterised by desegregation in an effort to accommodate the diverse nature of society. This article discusses the issues and problems related to the handling of diversity in education. Many variables have influenced the response of schools to learner diversity. These responses played out in several approaches and models. It is also argued that the decentralisation of education provided racially defined communities the legal means to preserve their privileges, that schools have been much more successful at meeting the demand for racial desegregation than achieving the ideal of social integration and that messages forthcoming from "race" affect black learners more negatively than other learners in South Africa. Because handling diversity in education is so complex, it is proposed that educators need to recognise the validity of differences. It requires firstly a reappraisal of educators' own personal and of institutional ideologies and perceptions, and secondly a frank conviction and dedication to facilitate and manage learner diversity.

Introduction

In South Africa, with its culturally diverse society, desegregation and the changes in educational systems and educational institutions (e.g. schools, universities) brought great challenges for educators, for example the heterogeneity of the student population has increased, curricula have changed and a new educational legislature is being instituted. The increasing cultural diversity in educational institutions necessitates that educationists teach and manage learners with cultures, languages and backgrounds that are unknown to them. Du Toit (1995:212-213) takes the view that the opening of schools to all races does not automatically ensure mutual understanding and acceptance between educators and learners and amongst learners themselves. Therefore desegregation *per se* does not lead to predictable and meaningful attitudal changes of groups to each other and can, in actual fact, lead to the heightening of tension and prejudices.

Jansen (2004:126) mentions that the formal arrangements for democratic education in South Africa are clearly in place. The suite of education policies produced since 1994 is impressive. Each policy makes commitments that signal profoundly democratic principles and practices for education. In this regard Jansen (2004:126) argues that "policy is not practice, and while an impressive architecture exists for democratic education, South Africa has a very long way to go to make ideals concrete and achievable within educational institutions".

Smith & Oosthuizen (2006:515-528) argue that the interpretation of the Constitutional phrase "unity in our diversity" clearly refers to the principle that the educational policy in South Africa should avoid creating a single overriding culture through the uniform assimilation of cultures. They also mention that unity among South Africans is advanced when common interests are displayed by everyone, like acceptance of constitutional values, love of the country and all its people, and advancement of economic, sport and cultural interests. In this united vision, the diversity of

individuals and communities must be respected and accommodated. It is essential that the constitutional value of diversity falls within the framework of a unified democratic educational system and is reinforced through provision for and tolerance towards the different languages, cultures and religions in the South African educational system.

Against this backdrop, this article analyses the handling of cultural diversity in a unified South African education system.

Responses to educational change and desegregation

Post-1994 policies and legislation that imposed desegregation in South African schools resulted in various institutions adopting diverse ways of responding to the diversified learner population. However, research (by Pillay 2004; Carrim & Soudien 1999; Vally & Dalamba 1999; Jansen 1998; Goduka 1998) places doubt on whether attempts at providing equitable and quality education for learners with diverse backgrounds, interests and abilities are successful. Introducing diversity does not only encompass desegregation to cater for various cultures or making accepted additions to the school curriculum. Research studies (e.g. Meier 2005:170-177) show that schools' responses to diversity and changes are inadequate.

The approach which is adopted in most schools, is known as an assimilationist approach. It involves that the learners are expected to adapt to the existing character of the school and to curricula that have been implemented for a different learner population. Van Heerden (1998:110) concluded in her research on teaching and learning in two desegregated South African high schools that the process of desegregation in these schools is primarily a case of assimilating black learners into the school and its culture, with the result that the *status quo* is kept intact.

Jansen (2004:117-128; 1998:103) reports that the "colour blind" approach to the curriculum is another way in which schools continue to maintain the *status quo* (former segregation bias). Educators claim to "see children and not colour" and studiously ignore race or colour in their dealings with learner diversity. In this regard Jansen (2004:117-128) lashes out "… that is exactly where the problem lies: a lack of consciousness, very often, of the ways in which schools are organized and teaching conveyed that in fact hold direct consequences for learners, identity and transformation". Meier (2005:170-177) and Moletsane (1999:43) reveal that according to research reports on the assimilationist approach, educators who apply the colour blind approach often try to suppress and gloss over their prejudice against learners from racial groups other than their own, by professing not to see colour. Furthermore, what is implied in these colour blind practices is the belief that the newcomers to the school come from educationally and culturally inferior backgrounds and that changing the curriculum to meet their needs amounts to lowering the otherwise high standards in these former white schools.

An approach that is also popular in South African schools is the contributionist approach described by Banks (2006:59), which involves that learners from cultures and groups other than the formerly dominant group of the specific school population are accommodated by including some aspects of their culture. Van Heerden (1998:110) and Vandeyar (2006), however, point out that a "cultural day" at school, such as a Zulu or Indian day with a variety of foods, or stringing together medleys of verses of songs in different languages in an effort by schools to signal acceptance of

"new" learners is a superficial add-on gesture that does little to bring about real unity in diversity. The problem is not that schools start here, but that they often stop here: what schools need to do instead is to move very quickly and steadily transform the entire curriculum. Schools need to get clarity on issues like whose culture they reflect, who is getting equal access to knowledge in the school, whose perspective is being heard and whose is being ignored (Vandeyar, 2006).

Fante (2000:35) argues that multicultural education enhances a teaching and learning approach which is ideal for the aspirations of the present education system, albeit that the advantages of multicultural education remain debatable. Squelch (1993) notes that scholars criticise multicultural education for its inability to bring about significant structural reform and address deep-seated racism in society. Moreover, Fante (2000:35) and Squelch (1993) argue that multicultural education tends to focus on the weak assumption that cultural understanding will lead to greater tolerance and racial harmony. This implies that multicultural education fails to deal with the real reasons why ethnic and cultural groups are oppressed and victimised. Multicultural education is also taken to task for regarding racism as an outcome of individual ignorance and prejudice rather than focusing on inherent structural factors in society. Meier (2005: 170-177) mentions that this debate is also reflected among educationists in South Africa, where some scholars are reluctant to identify themselves completely with the concept of multicultural education.

An "education for national reconciliation" model has been proposed by Cross and Mkwanazi-Twala (1998:28-30), who argue that the problem with multicultural education is that it does not contribute meaningfully to correcting the social and cultural imbalance in South Africa. They are of the opinion that education has entrenched and propagated ethnic and racial consciousness, thus increasing tensions and divisions in South African society. Cross and Mkwanazi-Twala (1998:28-30) argue that education was instrumental in disempowering the masses and in preventing them from taking control of their own lives and destinies. Furthermore, "South African multicultural education was based on a typical racist and oppressive value system which stressed racism, sexism, tribalism, individualism, elitism and the like" (Cross & Mkwanazi-Twala, 1998:28). They propose a model that redresses this legacy and that will reconcile unity and diversity as well as amend the existing imbalances in our society, which may hinder the process of nation building.

Carrim's (1998:311) research on desegregated South African schools has discovered that learners experienced assimilation, which Carrim (1998:31) describes as a denial of differences between people, rather than an authentic multicultural approach. Carrim (1998:311 also found that the minimal type of multiculturalism introduced by educators in schools was at best stereotypical, and at worst caricatured. The effect of this is to project differences among people in negative ways which do not combat racist practices, "leaving one with the inescapable conclusion that such forms of multiculturalism are reconstructed forms of racism" (Carrim 1998:313). A critical anti-racist approach to education that acknowledges and incorporates the notion of difference between people is suggested by Carrim (1998:313). According to Vandeyar (2006) anti-racist education is a perspective that cuts across all learning areas, and addresses the histories and experiences of people who have been left out of the curriculum. Its purpose is to help us deal with all the racial and cultural differences that are found in society. Anti-racist education should equip learners,

parents and teachers with the tools needed to combat racism and ethnic discrimination, and to find ways to build a society that includes all people on an equal footing. In accordance with Carrim, Soudien (1994:290-291) found that South African educators try to avoid the issue of race and shield their learners from real controversy. Neither the learner nor the educator "is perceived to have the power to confront the edifice of social division and inequality. Everyone in the process is left unable to explore his or her location in the social practices of division, oppression and exploitation." (Soudien, 1994:292.) Soudien (1994: 293) and Vandeyar (2006) are of the opinion that this may lead to a multiculturalism of neutrality.

Morrow (1998:232) propagates a multicultural education with its own South African definition, but only a society that has matured sufficiently in the post-apartheid era will be able to endorse such a definition. Morrow examined South African society in relation to several aspects of multicultural education including modernisation, the politics of difference, liberalism, cultural relativism and similarities and differences between apartheid and multiculturalism. In Morrow's (1998:232) argument headed "the politics of difference", he contends that the South African society, which exhibits social diversity in the starkest possible terms, should "recognize difference" if it wants to reflect global empathy with the "recognition of social diversity". According to Morrow (1998:232), South Africa has not yet mastered a secure framework in which it can make provision for politics of difference.

Notwithstanding the approach to or model for education, learner diversity will always be a characteristic of education that needs to be addressed.

Decentralisation: Policy for democracy and racialisation in schools

Soudien and Sayed (2004:101-115) argue that while the general policy direction of education, as embodied in the South African Schools Act of 1996, aims at providing free, compulsory and equal education, there are exclusionary possibilities latent within it. In this regard they refer to decentralisation as the principle at the core of the new state's governance arrangements. It is also argued that the way in which decentralisation was implemented, by devolving authority and governance to schools, provided racially and economically defined communities the legal means to preserve their privileges (Soudien & Sayed, 2004:106). The proposed decentralisation is described by Soudien and Sayed (2004:101-115) as being "at once a project for democracy but also a mechanism for the management of racialisation and racial difference". They further explain that decentralisation as a democratic project is about managing the country's heritage of difference and the inequality that went with it. Accordingly, decentralisation is an explicit project for heterogeneity (conceptually recognising difference through homogenising *the rights*, not the identities, that come with difference). Simultaneously, however, the principle of decentralisation permits, if not the reproduction of key racial features of the old order, then certainly the remaking of those old features in new forms. In these terms, Soudien and Sayed (2004:101-115) strongly argue that as much as decentralisation is a project for democracy, it is also a racial project.

The South African Schools Act (1996) was passed with the specific intention of giving parents the decentralised responsibility of managing their children's schools through school governing bodies (SGBs). Responsibilities given to SGBs include promoting the best interests of the school by determining an access policy; adopting a

mission statement that set out the goals and the shared values of the school; adopting a code of conduct for learners at the school and recommending appointment of teachers at schools. In addition, all SGBs have the right to supplement their school's resources by levying school fees (Soudien & Sayed, 2004:101-115; Jansen 2004-117-128). The above responsibilities clearly suggest that the South African School's Act (1996) provides schools real opportunity for institutionalising democratic structures and practices. But this is only policy and not practice; and it is only a possibility and not a procedure of inevitability (Jansen, 2004:117-128; Soudien & Sayed, 2004:101-115).

In a study at 12 schools in three provinces, Soudien and Sayed (2004:101-115) concluded that the way in which decentralisation was implemented, for example by devolving authority and governance to schools, provided racially and economically defined communities with the legal means to preserve their privileges. In similar research, Jansen (2004:117-128) referred to the school governing body as the most crucial "point of power" that sustained the status quo in schools. According to Jansen (2004:117-128) the school governing body is the entity that dictates the pace, content and direction of change (or no change).

The South African Schools Act invests in the schools the power to define their community or corporate identity and it gives parents the rights to define and protect their own linguistic orientation. Schools can invoke race without ever having to name it. SGBs use this power which results from their responsibility to "promote the best interests of the schools and to achieve quality education". In this regard, Soudien and Sayed (2004:101-115) argued that as much as the Schools Act is democratic, new racial discourses and practices have come into being in South African schools.

Racial desegregation vis-à-vis social integration in schools

Chisholm (2005:215) mentions that if race separation was the defining feature of schools in the apartheid era, race integration became a defining feature in the post-apartheid era. The South African Schools Act (1996) provided the basis for the reconstruction of schools in the image of non-racialism and the Constitution forbade all forms of discrimination. The new government made provisions for the integration of schools, the rewriting of curricula and textbooks and renewal of support structures in the management of the country's education.

Studies (Chisholm, 2005:216) suggest that despite desegregation of white, Indian and coloured schools and the significant demographic movements of people over the last decade and large numbers of children being bussed from townships to suburbs, a large number of schools in South Africa remain to a large degree mono-racial. The enrolment of black learners was increased in selected former white, Indian and coloured schools, however. According to Sujee (Chisholm, 2005:216) 25 per cent of black learners have shifted from the former township schools to other departments since 1996, but only 7 per cent of these are in formerly white schools, while a bigger proportion of Indian and coloured learners moved to formerly white schools. The majority of white learners (86 per cent) are in former white schools, but their number has decreased since 1996 as some have moved to independent or private schools.

Jansen (2004:117-128) comments that over the last 14 years, schools have been much more successful at meeting the demand for racial desegregation than achieving the

ideal of social integration. Racial desegregation was in many schools a relatively easy accomplishment. Many former white schools and even some with conservative histories (e.g. JG General Strijdom, General Smuts and CR Swart High School) have achieved significant levels of racial desegregation. However, many formerly white schools might have an excluding hidden curriculum around things that include the power of leadership, the pragmatism of Afrikaans communities, school ethos and culture and the working class character of the school.

According to Chisholm (2005:217), anecdotal evidence suggests that many schools, particularly those in the rural areas, stream learners – officially on the grounds of language, but unofficially on the basis of race and class. Some schools exercise a more benign form of assimilation but nonetheless expect learners to adapt to the cultural norms and practices of the schools, which were established under apartheid. The assumption here is that if learners want to attend these schools, they must abide by their rules and regulations, which often include hidden forms of discrimination against learners who do not share the school's linguistic, class and/or cultural norms (Chisholm, 2005:217).

Jansen (2004:117-128) observes that the Achilles heel of white schools has not been accommodating some black learners in former white classrooms, but not having black teachers in the same school. He ascribes this to deeply ingrained, racialised notions of white competence and black incompetence. Likewise, Soudien and Sayed (2004:101-115) also argue that the key way in which the issues of race, inequality and participation are being negotiated in South African schools is through the upholding of "standards". Schools use standards to provide a way to re-articulate concerns of race and class and displace and defer considerations of racial equity. These standards are non-negotiable and provided a justifiable and acceptable means to exclude black teachers from staff appointments, on the basis that standards need to be upheld. Soudien and Sayed (2004:117-128) found that the schools believed that they had much to protect and they resisted attempts to change the standards of their schools. They felt that the identities of schools were based on these standards and they sought to preserve the levels of excellence they thought they had maintained. Jansen (2004:117-128) strongly objects against this perception: "I simply do not accept the argument that in a country with almost 400 000 teachers it is impossible to find significant numbers of highly competent black teachers."

Even if black teachers are teaching in formerly white schools, they have present and past contexts to deal with. Moloi and Henning (2006:111-130) report on a study of the experiences of black teachers in white schools and cite the case of a black teacher who serves in a leadership position as Head of Department in the Junior Phase. She feels that she is victimised because of her race and reports her interaction with white teachers as discordant: "Where I am currently employed racism is rife ... I am still not accepted by the white people … White teachers treat me as a black person and feel threatened by black authority." It seems as if her leadership potential is inhibited by the very desegregating context in which she finds herself. She also experiences that she has different identities in different context, being celebrated in her black community but put down among her white colleagues. This positioning of herself is an obstacle preventing her from being the person and ultimately the teacher she wishes to be. For this teacher and many others in her position, the ideology of apartheid still subversively seems to be a knowledge system from which people draw

meaning, because it has not yet been replaced by the ideal of freedom as put forward by the Constitution.

It furthermore seems that many educators fail to achieve a sense of racial justice in the school curriculum (Jansen, 2004:101-115, Chisholm, 2005:219). Formally, the main initiative since 1994 has been the introduction of outcomes-based education and Curriculum 2005 (C2005) in 1997. In 2000, the latter was reviewed and revised and the Revised National Curriculum Statement was implemented. The curriculum only provides educators with guidelines and outcomes that ought to be achieved, but prescribes neither what content ought to be used nor the ways in which lessons should be designed. To maintain some degree of standardisation in the system, educators are to ensure that they teach in ways that are consistent with the principles of C2005, namely those of learner-centeredness and the promotion of critical and independent thinking among learners. Notwithstanding these requirements, Jansen (2004:101-115) observed in his study at schools that educators in especially the more established and privileged schools exercise considerable autonomy over how and what they teach. That autonomy means that many educators do not cater for the rich cultural diversity in the classroom. This is the result of curriculum biases which occur in the practice of content selection, analysis and utilisation. One economic or ethnic group is favoured over another and the bias becomes explicit when excluded groups are called on to respond as though they were included. This is not a learner-centred approach.

According to Jansen (2004:117-128), it is in the domain of democracy and institutional culture that education institutions fail to include, accommodate and affirm racial diversity and community and commonality. Institutional culture conveys a powerful message of for whom the institution caters. How black learners feel about former white schools is an indication of how inclusive and accommodative the school really is. The real test of whether South African education institutions have achieved inclusive institutional cultures might well be the extent to which black and white learners "feel at home" within the institution.

The meanings and messages of race

Racial integration in schools brought about changes and in many instances crises in the way school leaders perceive the management of their schools. Henze *et al.* (in Evans 2007:164) found that school leaders render reactionary rather than proactive responses to racial integration. Several reasons for this approach are documented. School leaders' willingness to act in response to change regarding increased diversity depends on whether they deemed the schools' identity and/or image to be at risk. Research findings suggest that a community relates school identity and image with the race or socioeconomic status of the schools' learners and they then act upon the negative labels and low expectations of black learners who wish to enter the school, to resist change (Ascher & Branch-Smith; Duke, Hargreaves & Goodson in Evens 2007:159-188). Many schools in South Africa are characterised by a "white flight", where white learners in working class schools migrate to neighbouring white schools when large numbers of black learners from dysfunctional township schools enrol at that particular school. According to Jansen (Rademeyer 2008) these white working class schools then become poor black schools – a prospect which is not tolerable for many school leaders. This attitude sends a message that race may have an influence on the acceptance and handling of diversity.

Another factor which affects the handling of diversity is school leaders' and educators' perceptions and expectations of diverse learners. Attention was drawn to this aspect of teaching after the publication in 1968 of *Pygmalion in the classroom* by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson. In this book they reported results of a study where the expectations of educators had a significant influence on learners' performance and progress. This self-fulfilling prophecy or Pygmalion effect is defined by Brehm and Kassim (in Tauber, 1997:14) as " the process by which one's expectations about a person eventually lead that person to behave in ways that confirm the expectations". Numerous studies indicate that educators tend to treat and cherish expectations about learners belonging to minority groups differently and that the racial and cultural background of learners is often a reason for this differential treatment (Rios, 1996). According to Sadker and Sadker (1985), educators tend to interact with, call on, praise and intellectually challenge white, male middle-class students most frequently and to reprimand black male learners most often.

Educators' perceptions and attitudes are formed, among other things, by their personal experiences and professional education. On a personal level, educators' perceptions are located in the individual's psyche (such as beliefs, values, biases, prejudices and generalisations drawn from personal experiences) (Evans, 2007:162). As a result, educators' perceptions, attitudes and personal experiences may fundamentally be at odds with the experiences of their learners who come from a different background in class, religion, gender and culture (Rios, 1996:15). Moreover, educators' perceptions are also shaped by a complex and extended process of socialisation, which takes place as a result of the kind of teacher education received, teaching experience and actual classroom practice, as well as educators' individual responses to the former.

The identities of the different groups in South Africa and their subsequent perceptions of other groups have been formed by colonialism, racism and apartheid, and are instrumental in determining the perceptions educators may have of groups other than their own. These group identities mitigate against the formation of a tolerant society and the equal treatment of learners in the classroom. Meier (2005:170-177) found that student teachers espoused strong group identities and these perceptions influenced their attitudes towards learners in the classroom. Student teachers experienced a significant distance from the groups they do not belong to. These perceptions determine how future educators define and tailor their behaviour in respect to the learners with whom they will interact while practicing their profession in the future. Educators enter classrooms with some idea about "other" groups and about why groups occupy different social positions, based on their lived experience (racial segregation) and the ideology (apartheid) they have learned to use to interpret those experiences. It can thus therefore happen that educators merely make a study of the "other" and retain their own ideas about justice and the preferred social system (Sleeter, 1996:120). In this respect, the tendency in desegregated schools in South Africa is to describe learner behaviour and potential in terms of membership of groups, such as race groups or places of residence (rural/urban or township/suburban), which leads to stereotyping of certain groups.

Furthermore, black learners in a predominantly white school feel it is expected of them to assimilate and adopt the existing ethos of the dominant culture. Research (Zafar, 1998; Jansen, 1998; Goduka, 1998) indicates a tendency on the part of black learners in desegregated schools to deny and reject their racial and cultural identities.

These learners tend to adopt their white teacher's and classmates' ways of talking, dressing and behaving and ridicule and reject that which they regard as black and therefore inferior. Moreover, assimilation may further alienate such learners from their own communities. In this regard, Van Heerden (1998:111) reports that when black learners attending previously white schools wear their school uniforms in the townships or speak English, they tend to be rejected by the community.

In addition, perceptions of who and what is normal based on race also contribute negatively towards transformation in schools. For example, in Sader's study (in Naidoo, 1999), a learner belonging to the dominant group in a desegregated school commented: "I think the outsiders [black learners] should go or they should become normal by thinking normal." What is implied is the belief that belonging to the dominant culture in the school is normal. Learners who are not members of the dominant group, are perceived as less than normal (Moletsane, 1999:37). Thus Moletsane (1999:31) cautions that for multiculturalism to succeed in schools, educators must be able and willing to validate the identities and worth which diverse learners bring to the teaching and learning environment.

Interviews with educators and learners conducted by Carrim (1998:310-313) in desegregated schools reported that "comments by educators and learners in 'Indian', 'coloured' and 'white' schools make consistent reference to an 'us' and 'them' language, which not only indicates the racially exclusivist ways in which they define their own identities, but also the predominance of assimilationism in their experiences of the desegregation of the school". On questions of social mixing with other groups, answers like the following were given: "Well, you see they have their own culture and we have our own. They do things differently from us." According to Carrim (1998:313) these comments do not only indicate that 'differences' are perceived negatively, in that the 'difference' is rarely viewed as a strength, but they also camouflage the racial implications of such negative projections.

Research by Pillay (2004:5-9) in a desegregated Indian school concluded that racial discrimination is practiced by both Indian educators and learners in the school. The practice of racism is confirmed by statements such as: "She [the educator] separates us from the Indian children, she does not teach us properly because we are black." Hickson and Kriegler and Christie (in Pillay, 2004:7) hold the view that racism has affected the lives of black children more negatively than it has those of other children in South Africa. Jeblensky (in Pillay 2004:7) also believes that racism negatively affects the mental health of black learners by denying them essential experiences such as a sense of security and warmth, freedom for personal growth and identification with a community of equals.

Pohan (1996:62), however, points out that educators' beliefs about teaching and learning often serve as a filter through which all that is encountered during their education programmes is interpreted. Thus, in spite of progressive teacher education, which prepares educators to react in culturally responsive ways, educators may unconsciously resist this kind of training. Against this background, it is important that change, which involves unlearning and relearning certain beliefs and attitudes about those races different from us, take place (Fante, 2000:38).

In this regard contemporary biologists and anthropologists reject race as a category because there is more genetic variation within racial groups than between them (Zuckerman in Klein & Chen, 2001). Moreover, individuals of a given race vary in their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. There is a need first to understand and then to explore the underlying cultural and circumstantial diversity within each so-called race. Bowser, Auletta and Jones (1993:81) suggest that everyone needs to understand that racial differences are cultural and circumstantial and not solely biological. Carrim (1998:313) further indicates that the historical race groups in South Africa are by no means culturally homogeneous and adds that cultural differences within these racial groups tend to be underemphasised in desegregated schools. However, there are many biases toward certain physical features because of historically conditioned roles, depictions in the media and stereotypical assumptions (Klein & Chen, 2001:14).

The acknowledgement of diversity places the focus on the variety in society, but most frequently on individual or group differences in a negative sense. For example, differences in hair texture, facial features and skin colour which are personal and inborn, are considered by some as important and significant: "Their importance lies, not in the characteristics themselves, but in the evaluations which are made of the individuals and groups which possess them. Evaluations of this sort belong, not really to biological science, but to cultural and social factors, like tradition, rumour, gossip and ignorance." (Hobbs, 1987:19-20.)

Handling of language diversity

The sociopolitical history of South Africa has contributed significantly to the exclusion of multilingualism. For many years English and Afrikaans were the official languages in South Africa, to the neglect of the black languages. Seen against the background of a very diverse community, struggles around language issues have been part of South African society for a long period. This struggle came to a head with the imposition of Afrikaans as mandatory medium of instruction in black South African schools. This "was the trigger which denoted the most sustained struggle against the whole system of Apartheid education, beginning with the mass protest of the Soweto learners on June 16 1976, which ultimately shook the very foundations of the Apartheid system" (Goduka, 1998:35).

Since 1994, language rights (including the right to be taught and to learn in the language of one's choice) are guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996). Language rights have brought about their own complications and challenges, of which a few will be mentioned. Desegregation of schools has also resulted in schools now having a linguistically diverse learner population. Learners speak different home languages and have different levels of competence in the language of teaching and learning. Although the learner and educator population may be multilingual, for historical reasons the majority of schools have only one language of learning. Laufer (2000:12) points out that "if multilingualism is to become reality, this has serious implications in terms of resources and support from education departments for schools and individual educators. It also has far reaching implications in terms of teacher training and publishing of materials and textbooks."

Although educators in formerly white schools are often bilingual, that is, proficient in the two official languages of the apartheid era, namely Afrikaans and English, few are

proficient in black South African or other languages. The result is that the educator cannot adequately support the language development of learners who speak other languages. This situation impacts on the academic and social relationship between the educator and the learner. It also impacts negatively on communication among learners in schools (Van Heerden, 1998:98).

Furthermore, the black South African languages are commonly viewed as unsuitable to be mediums of instruction because they do not have the necessary scientific and technological vocabulary and vast array of conceptual frameworks. Due to the legacy of apartheid, the black languages spoken in South Africa tend to have varying levels of incapacity. There is, however, a commitment from the government to invest resources into developing the black South African languages (Laufer, 2000:31). Another implication is the discrimination against speaking a non-standard dialect (or variety) of the languages of learning. The learner whose home language is different from that of the dominant group at school is often made to feel that his or her home language is a second-rate language. This leads to poor self-esteem among learners (Du Plooy & Swanepoel, 1997:143). Learners may also employ mixing languages (code switching) where a speaker uses one language and changes to another while in the middle of a sentence. These linguistic manoeuvres are aimed at effective communication, but may be misunderstood by the school.

It is worth considering, too, that although both Afrikaans and English can boast high levels of sophistication as a result of preferential treatment in the past, English enjoys superior prestige as a language of access that allows people with advanced levels of proficiency in that language to engage in debate, study, research, publication, employment outside South Africa and participation in international affairs. The dominance of English in international circles tends to impact profoundly on local cultures, which therefore finds themselves in a state of relatively radical flux commensurate with their levels of exposure.

Conclusion

A new democratic South Africa has brought an awareness of the diverse nature of society in the country. Therefore the accommodation of the experiences of all people in South Africa should be part of educational planning. The handling of diversity will be a contentious issue for years to come, during which upheavals and changes in educational philosophy and practice will still be part of South Africans' lives.

To handle diversity effectively in education, educators need to recognise the validity of differences. It requires firstly a reappraisal of personal and institutional ideologies and perceptions, and secondly a frank conviction and dedication to facilitate and manage learner diversity.

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