

Black Grade 9 learners in historically white suburban schools and their experience of integration

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Any school that denies that intercultural and interracial differences exist and that lacks effective accommodation strategies for all its learners could thwart learners' feelings of truly belonging to the school. This could leave them feeling like outsiders — an experience that could have a negative impact on their school careers and future lives. This article investigates, from an educational psychological frame of reference, the situation of black¹ Grade 9 learners in historically white suburban schools as learners in transition between two worlds, with specific reference to the individual, family and school/cultural dimensions. An in-depth look into the life-worlds of a group of such learners was obtained by means of a literature study, questionnaires and individual interviews. To ensure a holistic perspective on problems and possible solutions, an 18-factor culture general framework was used as a basis and applied to the South African situation. The study found that black Grade 9 learners attending historically white suburban schools faced difficult scholastic, social and emotional challenges. These included dealing with high scholastic demands whilst lacking the required educational background as well as financial, social and environmental resources; coping with or antipathy towards the Afrikaans language; a perceived "differentness" in habits and appearance and especially coming to terms with their experience of racism in school. Learners' strengths were also highlighted. The improvement of accommodation strategies by the school to promote multicultural and anti-racist harmony in schools is discussed.

Introduction: statement of the problem¹

This study investigated the quality of accommodation and problems experienced by black learners who attend historically white schools. The South African educational system is currently in a state of flux and transition, creating a new responsiveness to alternative ways of thinking and behaving. The present educational dispensation advocates a multicultural policy, aiming for a non-racial and non-sexist education system. When local-traditional orientations² meet global post-modern orientations under this dispensation, as is happening in South African education, interests can and do conflict. This is especially the case if the infrastructure of the school concerned is inadequate or the teaching staff is underprepared and unqualified to handle this very demanding situation.

In order to survive and grow, South Africa must invest in highly schooled human resources to prepare the country to cope with a global shift into the post-industrial age. No society can afford to carry the failures of education. Banks (1990:210) maintains that, in the twenty-first century, effective citizens should possess the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills demanded by a global world economy which is "primarily service and knowledge-orientated". Mbigi and Maree (1995:11) argue that if the South African economy is to survive in the face of global competition, it must address its problems by capacity building and adapting its training strategies. South African education therefore faces the task of finding ways for learners from both pre-industrial, modern and post-modern environments to contribute to and share in a prosperous future by making a concentrated effort to utilise all the available brain-power and to aim for academic excellence even at school level. Creating a stabilising and accommodating atmosphere within schools which will allow learners to realise their scholastic

potential without cultural or social constraints would make a positive contribution.

To achieve such changes, it must be remembered that all learners carry the baggage of previous and current formative influences and experiences. A large number of learners attending historically white schools hail from non-technological cultural backgrounds. Obviously, an increasing number of black learners are urbanised and move away from a local-traditional lifestyle. However, in the schools investigated in this study, the respondents came mostly from relatively traditional backgrounds and themselves highlighted differences they noted between themselves and their white counterparts.

Many have been brought up in, or at least exposed to, a culture of poverty at some point in their lives. The problem is highly complex, particularly when the demands made of the school as an agent of change are unrealistic because different societal groups have different expectations. Numerous authors, including Coutts (1992) and Cushner, McClelland and Safford (1992), have voiced concern about the inability of schools to solve deep-seated social problems. Klein (1993:21) says that some ethnic minority parents respect education as the provider of the surest method of self-improvement. Consequently, there is a demand that schools therefore live up to these expectations. Ramphele (1992:19) indicates that in South Africa, schools became the targets of anger in the mid 1980s because they failed to address the perceived needs of township residents. South Africa has to face the reality that a large segment of its population lives in Third World circumstances. According to Hoopes' model of intercultural education (Cushner *et al.*, 1992:270), this Third World segment falls into the local-traditional category and this implies physically deprived living conditions which may seriously affect schooling because such conditions counteract the development of a positive culture of learning.

Post-apartheid South Africa generates greater opportunities than ever before for black adolescents and also prescribes new roles. New role prescriptions may result in a double-bind situation. Such a situation could marginalize some of these adolescents and alienate them from their own social realities. At the same time, they may be left without the necessary support, guidance and coping skills to negotiate new roles successfully. Peltzer (1993:16) explains that a traditional person's behaviour is a manifestation of the collective virtues of the family and the group. No intrinsic value exists outside the kinship network. Social status depends upon the group and its norms, values

¹ In the context of this study black learners indicate black adolescent scholars, who enter the westernised technological school system from a culturally and possibly socio-economically different background.

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and ideals. When a transitional person has undergone (as learners in historically white schools do) an individuation process which emphasises individual achievement, competition and a desire to excel, the transitional person can no longer be regarded as a "group person".

During adolescence, transitional persons realise that they are individuals who are responsible for their own destiny and are, in fact, in opposition to others. Bulhan (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997:254) explains that the process of acculturation often undermines the containing culture of collectivity left over from the 1970s and 1980s. More importantly, it leaves the historically oppressed "experiencing a psychological tension related to [their] straddling different worlds that all become increasingly alien".

Consequently, black adolescents may need to develop identities that allow them to cope with an ideological shift from collectivism to individualism. Chinkanda (1994:196), Mayeske and Beaton (1975:4) and Hartshorne (1992:53) argue that children cannot be treated as learners in the normal sense without considering their immediate background and family history and the impact of these factors on their reaction to the learning milieu. In order to ensure that black learners' true identities are not denied and that they are not and do not feel discriminated against at school, this research uses a holistic approach to gain a better understanding of the life-world(s) of black learners.

Research aims and objectives

The first aim of this study is to highlight some of the educational and underlying emotional needs that could arise from the cultural, socio-economic and historico-political orientations of Grade 9 black learners who attend historically white schools. The second aim is to create an awareness of the importance of emotional, social and ecological factors in the creation of an effective, educationally sound and accountable support school structure. These needs include those originating from any possible educational backlog, as well as from different perceptions and expectations of the self, the school and society. The information gained could then be used as the basis for the development of an educationally sound and accountable support structure. The nature of this support structure should be such that disadvantaged learners are not penalised in any way, but are instead given every opportunity to realise their potential to the full in order to counter any possible educational backlog.

A study was therefore undertaken to elicit black learners' true feelings and thoughts regarding their schools as well as to further understanding of how the life-worlds of black learners influence their perceptions and expectations of school and their specific educational needs (Erasmus, 1999:21-22). To accomplish this broad aim, it was essential to formulate research questions which were approached from the perspective of educational psychology. A holistic approach was used in this study, implying that, to understand and assist learners, one must see them against the backdrop of their life-worlds — their family, friends and the society (or societies) in which they function. The idea was to understand the range, the nature and the impact of the influences in the life-worlds of these learners on themselves and consequently on the degree to which they experience accommodation at school.

Study population

Grade 9 black learners were chosen as the target population, because they could draw on their experiences during their year in Grade 8. Also, they have not been exposed to secondary school for so long as to impress certain ways of behaviour on them. The schools selected were historically white, multicultural suburban schools in Northern Districts 1 to 4 and run by the Gauteng Department of Education. Only 18 schools conformed to the criteria concerning region, districts and group size (fewer than 20 black Grade 9 learners; between 20 and 40; more than 40). For logistical reasons, the group of fewer than 20 learners had to be discarded. Two schools were selected from each district — one from the small group and one from the larger group. This sampling method can be described as a multi-stage stratified

cluster sample, using judgmental criteria (Steyn, Smit, Du Toit & Strasheim, 1996:16-54). The sample contained 332 learners, which provided fairly good coverage of the total target population.

Data collection and processing

A literature study was followed by the implementation of a two-phase design using two research instruments, namely:

- a questionnaire (quantitative research); and
- interviews (qualitative research).

In addition, the researcher also informally used the observation method, by keeping a field journal.

The questionnaire data were processed and analysed by means of statistical calculations and documented as frequency tables and figures. One-way frequency analysis was used to establish trends relating to single factors. The chi-square test was used in two-way frequency tables to investigate possible significant dependence between two variables at a time (Steyn *et al.*, 1996:559-562). In addition, the log-linear model was used to do more in-depth analysis of significant relationships found between two variables (Steyn *et al.*, 1996:564-576).

The questionnaire

The aim of the questionnaire was to obtain quantifiable, comparable data as well as to obtain a representative sample of Grade 9 learners' opinions and experiences. The questionnaire was applied to 332 learners. A suitable research instrument was not available, so it was necessary to design a structured questionnaire that could be considered efficient, culturally relevant and, more importantly, was designed for the appropriate reading level. In all the dimensions, indicators were established and questions were based on these indicators in order to operationalise dimensions.

The following dimensions are covered in the questionnaire:

- Biographical information: Learners were asked about their age, gender, first year in Grade 9 and their home language.
- Family dimension: This dimension investigated aspects of the socio-economic status of the learners' families as well as the learners' perceptions of factors related to their home and family circumstances.
- Individual dimension: This dimension deals with aspects which have to do with the learners themselves.
- School/cultural dimension: This section deals with learners' perceptions of a number of aspects concerning the school which are grouped under the headings of school atmosphere, the classroom and assessment.

An open-ended question aimed at obtaining a realistic picture of learners' feelings about the degree of accommodation at their schools was also included. Parents gave written permission for their children to participate in the research. The respondents knew that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage, should they wish to do so. The objective of the questionnaire was explained. Respondents were informed that they would remain anonymous, since no names appeared on the questionnaires.

The interviews

The aim of the individual focus interviews was primarily to gain insight into the experiences, the perceptions and the life-worlds of black Grade 9 learners in multicultural, historically white schools, while also exploring the situation of these learners as experienced, perceived and explained by the teaching staff at the same schools. Secondly, it increased the credibility of the eventual findings by allowing the researcher freedom to probe for clarification, as well as to change or adjust the questions to suit the knowledge, status and involvement of the specific respondent (Kreflung, 1991:218; Merriam, 1988:86).

Interviews were arranged with learners and educators. A convenience sample involving eight learners was taken from the population. Teaching staff were requested to select respondents who could communicate in English, had completed the questionnaire, were in

touch with the general feelings of their peer groups and were not afraid to air their opinions. The aspects discussed during the interviews gauged the learners' perceptions about:

- language
- initial expectations of their respective schools
- discipline
- educators
- relationships with fellow black and white learners
- participation in sporting/cultural activities
- belonging to the school
- changes that they would like to make to their respective schools

Each school had to appoint an educator as spokesperson. The educator had to know the Grade 9 learners well enough to be interviewed on issues relating to these learners. The aspects discussed with the educators regarding the learners were:

- initial adjustment problems
- level of scholastic coping
- nature of parent/child communication
- nature of social mixing amongst different cultural groups
- participation in sport and cultural activities
- any current adjustment problems

Each of the individual interviews lasted for an average of one hour. Semi-structured questions were put to the learners and teaching staff. The interviews were recorded on audiotape (the respondents' own permission was sought for this), and verbatim transcriptions, analyses and interpretations were done afterwards. The researcher assumed that the sample size was sufficient when a repetition in themes (data saturation) appeared in the description of the experience of a specific phenomenon by the respondents. This assumption is in line with recommendations by Parse, Coyne and Smith (1985:18).

Results

The results of the questionnaire and psychometric tests are outlined first. Then, the results of the group discussions are discussed.

Biographical data

Of the 332 learners who completed the questionnaire, 138 (41.8%) were 15 years old, 108 (32.7%) were 14, 18 (5.5%) were 13 and 66 (20.0%) were 16 or older. Of the respondents, 185 (55.7%) were girls and 147 (44.3%) were boys. For 288 (86.7%) of the learners, this was their first year in Grade 9, whilst 44 (13.3%) were repeating Grade 9. Tswana was the language most spoken, in 147 (44.4%) of the respondents' homes, followed by Northern Sotho in 43 (13.0%) and Southern Sotho in 28 (11.5%) of the homes. English was spoken in only 11 (3.3%) of the homes — a significant finding, since English is the language that 277 (86.0%) of the learners wanted as their medium of instruction.

The family dimension

In the family dimension the most prominent findings appeared to be that high parental expectations put pressure on learners to perform scholastically — in many instances beyond their capabilities and in schools that would not necessarily have been their own first choice, either because of a language problem or a particularly high academic standard.

Many learners stayed in townships. Being on time for school demanded much effort. Furthermore, the family support system was often inadequate in that learners (particularly girls) are burdened with too much responsibility for housework and sibling care, which leaves little time for studying. It appears that many parents are ignorant about the time demands of schoolwork, but are willing to co-operate when they are better informed.

The data indicated that authority relationships within the family were still reasonably intact, and parents' traditional viewpoints are still respected by a large number of 287 (86.4%) of the learners. A cause for concern was the finding that there seemed to be a general lack of communication between parents and children. The parent-child rela-

tionship appeared to lack emotional intimacy, since as many as 222 (67.1%) of the learners felt they could not discuss personal matters with their parents or caregivers.

The general quality of discipline may be questioned, since being shouted at and other negative methods of punishment predominated among the disciplinary actions reported by 155 (46.7%), almost half, of the respondents. In a majority of 232 (70.1%) of cases, the disciplinarian was female, highlighting the important role that mothers or other female caregivers play as the parents or caregivers who usually carry most responsibility for childcare.

It appeared that traditional Afri-centric values were still an influential aspect of the family system. Learners find themselves in the unenviable state of being in transition. This means that they inhabit two different life-worlds, in that they are expected to be as much part of an African-oriented culture as they are of a westernised culture. This leaves these learners to deal with the dilemma of a double-bind situation — an extremely difficult situation in which many learners received neither the necessary support and recognition, nor guidance.

The data gathered from those learners who knew details about their parents' educational qualifications are set out in Table 1.

Table 1 Highest qualification level of parents

Qualifications of parents	Father		Mother	
	f	%	f	%
Grade 7 (Std 5) and lower	2	0.6	5	1.5
Grade 10 (Std 8)	11	3.4	10	3.0
Grade 12 (Matric)	29	8.9	29	8.8
Grade 12 (Matric) plus diploma	23	7.1	49	14.8
Grade 12 (Matric) plus degree	71	21.8	94	28.4
I do not know my father / mother	18	5.5	5	1.5
I do not know	171	52.6	139	42.0
Total	325*	100	331*	100

* There was a missing frequency of 7 for Question 9 (What is your father's highest qualification?) and a missing frequency of 1 for Question 11 (What is your mother's highest qualification?). These frequencies were discarded due to unreliability. The first group of responses were from learners who knew what their parents' qualifications were.

It is particularly important for this study that 171 out of 325 (52.6%) learners did not know what their fathers' qualifications were, and 139 out of 331 (42.0%) learners did not know what their mothers' qualifications were. Also, 18 out of 325 (5.5%) learners did not know their fathers, and 5 out of 331 (1.5%) learners did not know their mothers.

Regarding the occupational status of the parents, classified according to a scheme developed by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the majority of fathers' occupations included occupations such as clerks, salespeople, schooled tradesmen, as well as professional, semi-professional, administrative or managerial occupations. The majority of mothers' occupations resorted under either professional, semi-professional, administrative or managerial workers. Next came occupations such as clerks, salespeople, schooled tradeswomen and trained outside occupations. Very important was the fact that as many as 105 (31.8%) of the fathers' and 54 (16.4%) of the mothers' occupations were unknown to their children. The finding that many children did not know what their parents' qualifications and/or occupations were supports the impression that there is a lack of adequate communication between these parents and their children as set out above.

A significant number of 141 (42.9%) of the learners lived in townships. This means that many of these learners commuted daily between two different life-worlds, and spend a large amount of time on travelling. Generally it appeared that these learners' home accommodation and the amenities were adequate, since there were enough

bedrooms for the number of occupants. However, 13 (3.9%) had no running water, 32 (9.7%) did not have warm water readily available, 4 (1.2%) did not have electric lights; 7 (2.1%) did not have access to a fridge and, in 24 (7.3%) of the homes, newspapers were not read. It also appeared that 205 (61.7%) of the learners experienced some form of obstruction or hindrance on a fairly regular basis when they wanted to study.

The individual dimension

Although there was limited evidence of identity confusion, it was found that learners generally have good self-esteem. Self-esteem and encouragement by the parents of learners to attend to studies, as well as an ability to confide in their parents, were positively correlated. However, regular exposure to racism could possibly have generated, at least to some degree, the negative self-responses regarding the scale item "I wish I could like myself more": 238 (72.6%) said yes; 42 (12.8%) were uncertain, whilst 48 (14.6%) said no. Respondents felt marginalized and it appeared that their self-esteem could easily be shaken by inconsiderate actions. A question that determined their sensitivity to criticism revealed that, when asked how they would feel if they were criticised, 128 (38.8%) said they would be very upset, 142 (43.0%) would be a little upset and only 60 (18.2%) would not be at all upset. These learners had to juggle identities between two different life-worlds in that, apart from functioning in their own culture, they also have to interpret accurately cultural rules not their own.

The respondents had unrealistically high social, scholastic and career aspirations — 72.9% aspired to a degree plus a diploma or certificate, whilst 15.7% would be satisfied with a degree. Preferred occupations are those in the higher status professions — doctor (20.2%), chartered accountant (13.66%), lawyer (11.5%) and engineer (8.5%). There are indications that many struggle with their schoolwork and that they do not devote the time to their studies needed in order to achieve their goals. The lack of realism in this regard could create problems for these learners later.

The school/cultural dimension

The results indicated the following:

A few learners preferred to socialise with out-group (white) learners rather than with in-group (black) learners.

There appeared to be some realisation of big differences between African and Western traditions.

There were indications that wealth and scholastic excellence are attributes that are not sanctioned by the black peer group.

A majority of 252 (75.9%) respondents were happy at school. The reasons specified for unhappiness when at school centred around interpersonal relationships and mainly concerned educators and social factors.

Learners conceded the importance of good schooling but some appeared to go on simply because they feel they should, as this would give them upward mobility in life. They viewed their schools as good educational institutions and as providing much better quality schooling than can be found in townships.

When given a choice of schools, 257 (77.6%) of learners would choose a school where all race groups are equally represented. A very small minority of 9 (2.7%) would prefer an all-black school population. It was found that the frequency of racist insults influenced learners' preferences regarding the composition of the learner population in a school. A statistically significant difference was found between the frequency of racist insults and the composition of the learner population in a school (Erasmus, 1999:175). There was an indication that learners who preferred a school with only/mainly black learners tended to experience racist remarks far more often, whilst those that chose schools where all races are equally represented showed a greater tendency never to experience such remarks. The preference for a school with equal representation of all races could be interpreted as a wish to genuinely belong to and be accepted in the schools these learners are currently attending.

It appeared that many respondents disliked the institutional control of the school in the form of rules that control their dress code and general freedom of behaviour. School rules was the factor most frequently cited by learners in an open question regarding what they want to change about their school (see Table 2). However, these learners appeared to understand the need for discipline quite well and express a distinct need for externally imposed order and discipline. They regarded it as extremely important that discipline should be fair and devoid of any racial bias whatsoever.

Table 2 Changes most desired at school

If you could, what would you change about your school to like it more?	f	%
School rules	65	19.6
Racism	61	18.4
Language	57	17.2
Teachers	54	16.3
Discipline	29	8.7
Activities	22	6.6
Facilities	19	5.7
No change	25	7.5
Total	332	100

There was extreme antipathy towards the Afrikaans language. Although English was only spoken in 11 (3.3%) of the homes, it was still the most popular medium of instruction. Most learners (86.0%) preferred to be taught with English as the medium of instruction. However, a fairly high level of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) was reasonably common.

Although a majority of 250 (82.0%) of the respondents regarded being punctual for school as important, 82 (24.7%) still condoned getting to school late. However, there were indications that some learners think in terms of a future-oriented time perspective. Traditional African cultures tend not to be future-oriented, while industrialised, western cultures are (Van Heerden, 1992:144). Condoning latecoming for school and time spent on schoolwork were significantly correlated. Learners who condoned latecoming appeared not to be motivated to do their homework, whereas those who spent some time on their homework did not condone latecoming.

It appeared that communication based on traditional courtesy, such as loud talk, the undesirability of eye contact as a sign of respect and the extent of personal space maintained during conversations can cause cultural misunderstanding, as these issues are approached from learners' own cultural mindset(s), which may not be understood by educators from a different background.

The data indicated that respondents saw the interests of the group as more important than the interests of individuals, to the point of sacrificing individual comfort and well-being. Some learners could experienced group pressure regarding the undesirability of individual achievement and excellence.

Although the preferred way of conflict resolution appeared to be discussion, more than a third of respondents would opt for more drastic measures, including the use of physical force: 19 (5.7%) of the respondents condoned such measures. The manner in which trouble is handled at school and working harder at a subject learners dislike were significantly correlated. It was found that learners who said they would work harder at a subject they disliked would also handle trouble at school by admitting their guilt and apologising, but the converse was also strongly correlated: learners who said they would not work harder at a subject they disliked also say they would not admit guilt and apologise if they got into trouble at school.

Despite extremely high academic and occupational aspirations, the time spent on schoolwork by the majority of respondents did not exceed two hours per day — 18 (5.4%) spent no time on schoolwork, 126 (38.0%) spent one hour and 80 (24.1%) spent two hours. It

therefore appeared that learners did not see any relationship between personal input and academic success. Although a majority of 224 (67.7%) of respondents indicated that they were prepared to work hard at a disliked subject, a substantial number of 107 (32.3%) respondents were not prepared to do so, or were uncertain. Of the respondents 169 (51.1%), just over half, preferred not to be examined to determine who should pass or fail.

The frequency of racist insults experienced and relations between cultural groups were significantly correlated (Erasmus, 1999:173-174). Racism was the factor second most frequently cited by learners in terms of what they want to change about their school (see Table 2). The vast majority of learners indicated that racist insults occur "very often" or "sometimes", which demonstrates that this is a contentious issue. The frequency of racist insults and the medium of instruction of the schools were significantly correlated. It was found that the frequency of racist insults was higher at Afrikaans-medium schools than at English-medium schools. Of the learners who described inter-cultural relations at their school as "co-operate but do not mix", most experienced racist insults only "sometimes". By contrast, among those who chose the "putting up with one another" option, few never experienced racist insults or name-calling.

Individual interviews

This research has given a number of learners "voices" which enabled them to draw attention to their feelings about and needs in the school. With that the opportunity arises to help schools and educational reform movements to respond better to the needs of such learners. The interviews with the eight learners and eight educators concentrated on their experiences and feelings regarding the same dimensions as those addressed by the questionnaire. Extracts from some of the respondents' responses are included verbatim to highlight specific aspects of the analysis.

The family dimension

Regarding expectations and pressures emanating from this dimension, two facets, namely roles within the family and choice of schools, emerged as factors which affect learners' happiness within a multi-cultural school. Research findings indicate that an inordinate amount of responsibility regarding childcare and housework could frustrate learners' efforts to comply with the demands of school. This is particularly relevant where the standard of schooling demands dedicated study hours. Literature on the subject confirms that there is a tendency to rely heavily on children for help in running the house. Swart-Kruger (1994:223) refers to circumstances that oblige parents to make arrangements that burden their children with heavy responsibilities.

It also appeared that a number of learners were given little say in the choice of school. It left them feeling pressurised to perform well in an educational situation that is not necessarily to their advantage and having to cope with an unfamiliar medium of instruction. Bot (1992:79; 91; 93) stated that even in very low income families, parents are willing to pay substantial contributions to ensure a better education. Cleaver (1994:10) explained that children can become an extension of the parent; when children study well (in other words the extended self carries out the parent's wishes), the parent feels fulfilled and experiences pride. Should this not happen, the parent experiences a sense of failure, which in turn places pressure on the learner to perform.

The parent-child relationship in many learners' homes lacked the elements of trust and/or understanding. This led to a breakdown in communication, resulting in a dysfunctional family system which could severely impede the development of the child and consequently prevent the achievement of optimal self-actualisation.

Verbatim responses that illustrate the breakdown in communication included the following:

"But it's difficult to talk to your parents, especially for our black kids. It's difficult to talk to your parents about boyfriends and girlfriends and stuff like that."

"I can't open up to my parents ... Ja, I do trust them, but ... not my personal life."

It appeared that parents were not aware of and showed little understanding for the changing norms that constitute their children's life-world (Cleaver, 1994:10-11). Cleaver (1994:10-11) also mentions that communication about childbirth and sexuality is still extremely difficult and embarrassing for many black parents, while children today demand to be informed on these matters. The difficulties highlighted by Cleaver could indicate a tendency for communication between parents and children to deteriorate rather than improve. Also, to cope with the prolonged absences or general unavailability of black parents or caregivers, children have developed alternative coping mechanisms. Liddell, Kvalsvig, Shabalala and Qotyana (1994:6) pointed out that, in the absence of available adults in larger households, children rely more on other children for interaction and information — a tendency that brings its own problems.

The individual dimension

It appeared that most of the learners had high individual aspirations, both academically and socially; they viewed school as an institution that will ensure upward mobility in their futures.

The following excerpt from the interviews reflects the sense of most of the respondents that they generally feel controlled at school and that they require more freedom of choice regarding a code of conduct, particularly concerning physical appearance and music.

"No, it's not really our school. And sometimes you know we don't get the freedom, the freedom uhhh, what we would usually do here, if you do it that mean trouble."

Gillborn (1995:157-8) argues that adhering to certain elements of a specific dress code, though it appears overtly non-racial, has the potential to disadvantage people of specific backgrounds. This is significant, because, for learners who already feel marginalized and discriminated against, this might add to the feeling of not being part of the school.

Learner: "... cause they don't allow gels in hair for us blacks ... Then if the teachers told them they mustn't pour gel in their hair ... don't agree with the teachers."

"Why do you think that is?"

[The respondent cracks his knuckles] "Because our blacks' hair, when you don't put gel, you get dried up and then sometimes it breaks."

Regarding music preferences, learners experienced themselves as "different" regarding this matter, and required more autonomy in the choice of music at socials:

"... there was a show ... and hardly anybody got their tickets. So now I think they should actually ask the pupils what they would like to hear, not what the school is organising for us ... We've got different tastes of things ... I know a lot of us, especially the black pupils would have like something else ..."

Self-esteem

The findings indicated that the self-esteem of all the respondents was intermittently under attack. These attacks take many guises and appear to have a racist undertone as indicated by the following excerpts:

"Stop this racism. ... Calling names ... on the school grounds ... because they must feel how we feel when they do that to you."

"No we want to ... talk as we usually talk ... Laugh as we usually laugh ... Mr X, he personally came to us and told us: 'You girls are laughing so loud, we can hear you by the office. Please keep it down.' So it's situations like that, that you know, we don't feel OK talking when we have to talk ..."

Positive "mirroring" about the general self is important in the formation of a good self-concept during the adolescent phase. However, occurrences at school, as demonstrated by the above excerpts, can steadily erode any positive feelings of self-worth. This process could be intensified by feelings of marginalisation, not-belonging and the problem of establishing new in-groups.

"Because ... the whites, they have their own friends. Maybe I think, maybe I can go to them and stay with them. Maybe they will say ... why she came here? Why or what does she want or what? Something like that, so I just stay with my friends."

"No. No I don't, I don't ... [belong]. The school where I use to go to ... we didn't have racial issues and things like that, but we get here and it's all different ..."

As Markus & Kitayama (1994:112) say, "... for those with interdependent selves, feeling good requires a connection to others, and a connection to others produces good feelings." In order then to fulfil this need for feeling good and belonging, learners could develop their own in-groups with 'exclusive' membership. Should group membership be decided along racial lines, it could promote racism by counteracting the experience of the school as accommodating and starting a vicious cycle which threatens peaceful co-existence within multicultural schools. It is in such a cycle that the danger lies.

The school/cultural dimension

All the respondents had a problem with Afrikaans at school. Some regarded English as the most important language, especially those who desired upward mobility. The general feeling towards the usage of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction was one of negativism and stigmatisation. Some respondents were quite outspoken, saying that Afrikaans was undesirable, unimportant, with limited local and global usage. The responses mirrored the findings of a study by Finchilescu & Nyawose (1998:57) about the position of the Afrikaans language in KwaZulu-Natal.

It appeared that the respondents had generally experienced marginalisation through some form of racial discrimination or victimisation at school. A double standard regarding the application of discipline and general rules is pointed out as unacceptable. It appeared to cause internal conflict, since the learners cannot see why the members of various cultures should be treated differently, and ascribe these unfair occurrences to racism:

"... yesterday I was going to give ... a girl ... her pens ... So I stood up, I walked to her desk and then, when I were there, the teacher said no I mustn't stand up without her permission. And then two minutes later I see somebody else, a white girl, X, she was walking around. And the teacher did not say anything about it ... that does bug me. Why let somebody else walk around and then tell the other one to sit down?"

In some instances, there appeared to be a greater incidence of racism in the ugly form of belittlement and devaluation, either through physical or verbal abuse. The practice of racism creates a vicious cycle and stereotyping is perpetuated by the various generations (parents and learners) — both black and white. It could stem from an effort by white learners to fit in with their group:

"It's like they're trying to fit in with the rest. They're not all like that. They're not ... They try to fit it ... I think it's from our history ... So if the parents stop telling the kids the negative things, then it will be OK."

This study confirmed South African research by Aaron (Foster, 1994: 228-229), in that it does appear to confirm that black learners in Afrikaans medium schools were confronted by racist attitudes more often. However, there are indications of an awareness among the respondents in the current study that a considerable number of Afrikaans learners do not subscribe to racism.

The findings in the current study also appeared to support three South African doll preference studies which show that in two samples of black children and one sample of coloured children in the Western Cape, the children in the samples preferred a white doll; but, by contrast, they did not identify with the white doll (Foster, 1994:227-228). This agrees with the findings in the current study. Black learners do not necessarily want to be white, but, should the opportunity arise, a large number would prefer to associate with white learners rather than with black learners.

Although there appeared to be some realisation of considerable differences between African and western traditions regarding certain aspects, the need for more understanding and empathy within the cultural context was highlighted by the following comment:

"So I'm quite happy with the disciplinary procedures at the moment ... Most of the time yes ... but in the other times when they [teachers] should actually consider the child's story ... they should try being in the shoes of the pupil ... because you know the African traditions and the Western ones, they're quite different. So when you usually tell a teacher this — in Africa it's quite OK to say that, but then they know that it's quite OK for you, and they say that you be rude or something like that, which is quite unfair."

Some learners experienced stereotyping when communicative behaviour (audibility levels) that was culturally-correct to them was misinterpreted. This indicated a need for more cultural awareness and sensitivity by educators. Being late for school still presents a problem — while some learners feel that special arrangements could be made to accommodate latecomers and that they should not be punished, others criticise their peers for coming late, and some displayed a future-oriented time perspective:

"Yes, 'cause I mean life is all about time. You can't just sit around for an hour doing nothing. In that hour you could actually have been doing something else."

"Latecoming? ... I think that's not good, because if you are late now, you'll be late in future for your job."

A future-oriented time perspective is indicative of a gradual shift toward the acceptance and implementation of an industrialised time perspective (Van Heerden, 1992:244) and should contribute positively to these learners' scholastic achievement, assuming that these learners are functioning within a westernised environment such as the historically white suburban school.

Regarding conflict resolution — one respondent was particularly outspoken about the tendency amongst black adolescents to resolve conflict through physical force, confirming the findings of the questionnaire:

"... Blacks tend to become more aggressive ... You just have to sort it out the rough way ... they mostly use physical, physical. You have to be man enough to handle the situation, so the only way you can find out whether you're man or you're really strong, and what, it's the only way by fighting it through..."

It appeared that the media, along with group pressure, could promote anti-social behaviour. Substance abuse appears to be confined to drinking and the smoking of dagga.

Intracultural conflict consisted largely of own culture groups putting pressure on learners to behave in certain ways. This was true for black and white learners, as the following indicates:

"I don't fit in better with the, with the blacks, 'cause they, they call me a coconut, see ... It means like uhhm, I act white inside and black outside, I'm black outside ... Ja, I don't really like it [sounds and looks sad] ... It's not, it's not saying white and then I'm black ... We're just the same ... Ja, it's not the colour. It's just what's inside."

In post-apartheid South Africa, black adolescents have to develop an identity which will allow them to cope with existing social realities. Stevens and Lockhat (1997:253) refer to the double-bind situation of confusing and contradictory role prescriptions that many learners are caught in. However, in the current study, there is limited evidence that black girls experience white girls as being more relaxed about interracial contact than white boys, while realising that white girls are also exposed to intracultural group pressure concerning intercultural relationships. In fact, the empathy shown by a black respondent for white fellow learners who are exposed to similar group pressures appears to be unique to this research:

"They're nice. But they're girls, but they sometimes tell me: 'Oh, but my boyfriend doesn't want to see me with you' and stuff like that."

The implications for this study could be that female learners (both black and white) are attempting to break the bonds of group dictates regarding social interaction when a chance arise to do so. Consequently, this can make a positive contribution to bridging intercultural gulfs. Indications are that wealth and scholastic excellence are attributes that are not sanctioned by the group.

"They're jealous. I mean, they're very jealous. They'll start gossiping about you ... If you get high marks ... you gotta make sure you stay there! ... So you gotta study hard and make sure you stay on top, because once you go down [bitter laugh], that's when they gonna step on you ..."

Discussion

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

The family and biographical data and interviews suggest that educators may have to move beyond the school in their quest to support the learners. Guidance may be necessary for parents, and socio-economic development remains a vital issue that could make or break these learners' scholastic careers.

Note should be taken especially of the following:

- high parental premiums on scholastic performance;
- parental ignorance regarding scholastic demands;
- lack of emotional intimacy and proper communication between parent and child;
- the gender of the disciplinarian and the general quality of discipline;
- the unavailability of basic amenities to a small percentage (hot running water, electric lights, access to a refrigerator, newspapers, conducive circumstances for studying);
- the influential nature of traditional Afri-centric values on the family system;
- the fact that many learners live in townships and spend a large amount of time on travelling.

All of the above accentuates the role of the parent(s)/caregiver(s) and of the home on the lives of these learners. These learners have to juggle identities between two different life-worlds, in that, apart from functioning in their own culture, they also have to interpret accurately cultural rules not necessarily their own.

The research findings suggest that racism is a central issue and therefore still a core stumbling block to good accommodation at school. The ideology of crude racism in South Africa has been buried along with the past. Nevertheless, it appears to be reincarnated and flourishing in many subtle, and some not so subtle, guises within South African society, and consequently in South African schools.

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

Gillborn (1995:120) advocates anti-racism as such an approach,

in that it does not downplay the important aspects of cultural diversity, but rather aims to combat racism. Gillborn (1995:80,172,175) refers to Troyna and Hatcher (1992) as saying that any racist incident is about the misuse of power. Such transgressions or attacks may be perpetrated by white learners against black learners, or vice versa. Consequently, it is by no means only white learners who are capable of "committing" racism. Gillborn warns, however, that by adopting a doctrinaire approach of "symbolic" or "moral" anti-racism, the legitimacy of an anti-racism approach may be undermined. (symbolic or moral anti-racism is described as an extreme and reductionist form of anti-racism; this approach assumes the factors of race and racism to be dominant in the experiences of black and white learners, with the former cast as the victims and the latter as the transgressors). Instead, the answer lies in a commitment to equality, which translates into a genuine concern for the rights of all learners as individuals, as they go about their daily school routine in the classroom and playground. Where anti-racism is taken seriously, perpetrators of racism should be dealt with according to the merits of the situation without resorting to "automatically" pointing out a culprit.

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

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