
ABSTRACT

Teaching and learning in racially/culturally diverse classrooms in a post apartheid South Africa

As the title implies, this research concerned the convergence of race and culture in school settings. How the two categories are related is a complex matter, especially in the context of South Africa where race has played, and continues to play, a critical role in the formation of culture. The study aimed to investigate the dynamics of teaching and learning in racially diverse classrooms in three historically white former Model C Schools in Ekurhuleni East District of Gauteng Department of Education (GDE). To this end I conducted a multiple case study with Grade 8 pupils and their teachers, with a primary intention of illuminating the challenges, attitudes and emotions experienced by teachers and pupils, as well as the dynamics between teachers and pupils, and among pupils. Eight questions guided the data collection through extended on-site observation and interviews: (i) What are the experiences and challenges of teachers and pupils in racially/culturally diverse classrooms? (ii) How do teachers and pupils respond to these experiences and challenges? (iii) What preparation if any, have teachers had in order to face these challenges in racially/culturally diverse classrooms? (iv) How do teachers and pupils and pupils and pupils from diverse race groups interact? (v) What are teachers and pupils opinions about racially diverse classrooms?(vi) What is the significance of race to pupils at the three schools? (vii) How is race conceptualised and lived at school? (viii) What is the impact of the discourse of race on the lives of black pupils?

The theoretical framework of this research is situated in the field of teaching and cultural diversity. In order to place the research questions and findings in the context of international and local research and debate on cultural diversity in education, I consulted a wide range of both international and local literature.

The thesis presents the main research findings, in terms of four broad themes that cut across the research questions: Change, Subjective Reality and Assimilation; Discourse of Blame and Cultural Deficit Discourse; Home Culture versus School

Culture; Perceived Racism or Racism as a Consequence of Change. The analysed data revealed that teachers' were frustrated and it was evident from their subjective reality that they were not dealing well with change. Pupils preferred homogeneous groups rather than integrated groups thus there was little interaction between racial groups. Hostility was evident and in some cases resulted in fights between black and white pupils. Black pupils perceived the presence of racism among some white teachers and pupils

This study could, despite its limitations, pave the way for far more elaborate studies to be conducted.. Since statutory racial integration in South Africa is only ten years old the discourse of racial diversity needs to be illuminated through extensive and intensive research. Teachers need to address both social and educational aims simultaneously as the findings suggest that unless teachers acknowledge and understand diversity in their classrooms and understands the backgrounds of their pupils; these pupils are likely to remain marginalised and desegregated schools run the risk of not contributing to social change.

KEYWORDS

South African classrooms Historically white Former Model C schools Multicultural education, anti-racist education, change, assimilation, subjective reality, cultural deficit, colour-blind approach, culture, racial hostility, racial diversity