Cooperative Learning for Interracial Interaction: An action research study
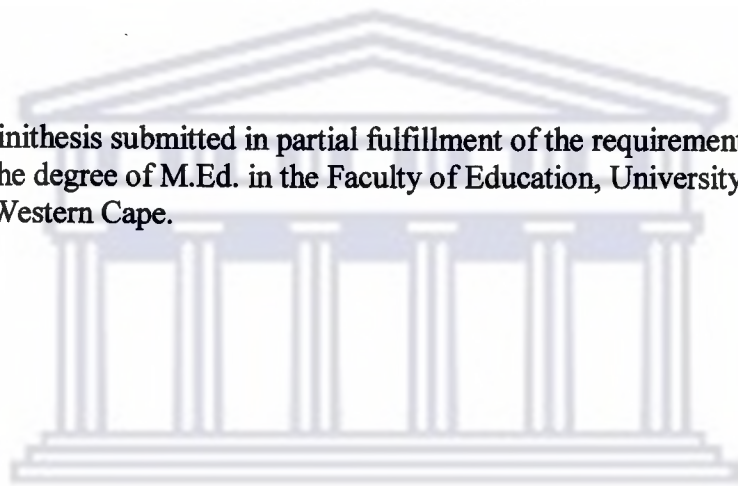
Mark David Adams

A minithesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M.Ed. in the Faculty of Education, University of the Western Cape.

Supervisor: Prof. Maureen Robinson

July, 2002

Keywords

1. teacher research
2. action research
3. classroom practice
4. pedagogy
5. cooperative learning
6. positive interdependence
7. interracial interaction
8. curriculum
9. groupwork
10. reflective practice

i

Abstract

<u>Cooperative Learning for Interracial Interaction: An action research study</u>

Mark David Adams

M.Ed. Mini-thesis, Faculty of Education, University of the Western Cape

South Africans are challenged daily by the legacy of apartheid. The racial divisions of the past continue to haunt South Africans, nine years into its democracy. This mini-thesis reports on an action research project that attempted to investigate the racial divisions that existed in my Natural Sciences classroom, and to explore how cooperative learning could be utilised to get learners from different racial backgrounds interacting with one another.

Through this research project I have come to the conclusion that in order for cooperative learning to be an effective tool to get learners working together and interacting with one another, there need to be proper planning and structuring of cooperative learning lessons, learners should know and understand what is expected of them, and learners should be placed in groups that would encourage interracial interaction. My research has also highlighted the difficulty Xhosa-speaking learners have with English being used as a medium of instruction and how this deepens the interracial division amongst learners in the classroom.
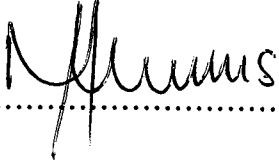
This mini-thesis also puts forward the argument that education is a powerful tool to be used for social transformation and that teachers need to play a proactive and reflective role as agents of social transformation.

Declaration:

I declare that *Cooperative Learning for Interracial Interaction: an action research study* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Mark David Adams   22 July 2002
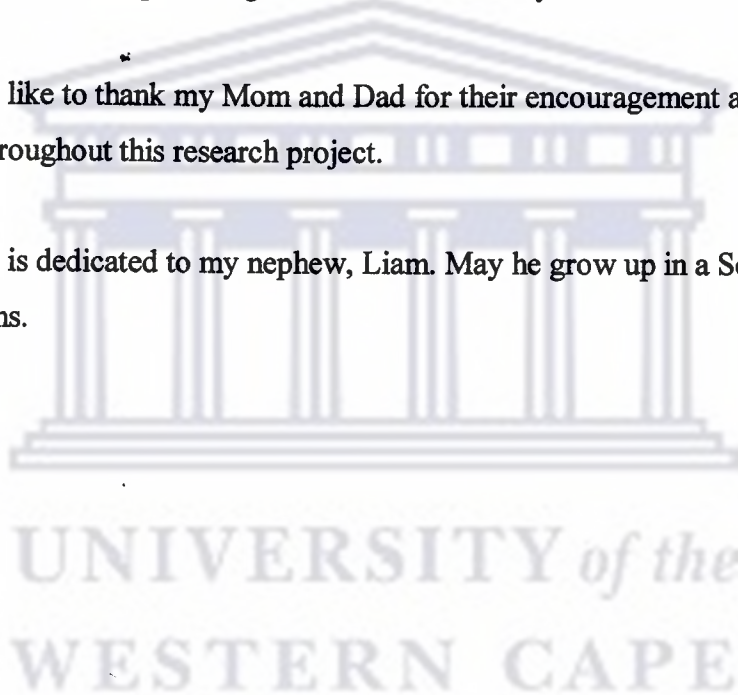
iii

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Maureen Robinson for her encouragement, motivation and guidance throughout this research project.

This project would not have been possible without the grade seven learners of Delft South Primary, especially the Grade 7A class of 2001. You have taught me that education is more than just an intellectual activity. Thank you for your willingness and hard work.

I would also like to thank my M.Ed. study group, in particular Andrew Wentzel and Denver Robertson. Your input and guidance were sincerely valued.

Finally, I would like to thank my Mom and Dad for their encouragement and guidance they gave me throughout this research project.

This mini-thesis is dedicated to my nephew, Liam. May he grow up in a South Africa free of racial divisions.

iv

Contents

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

Chapter 1

Setting the scene

Introduction

Between 1995 and 1999, I was a teacher in schools where learner interaction within the learning environment was prevalent and encouraged. In 2000, I started working at a school where learner interaction and participation in the learning environment were limited and some times non-existent. My new school had a distinct difference from all my previous schools. My learners comprised of two racial groups, whereas my previous schools comprised only of a single racial group. The interaction between the two racial groups at my new school was most of the time in conflict or many times non-existent. Coming from an environment that thrived on learners interacting and cooperating with one another and engaging in the lesson, the new environment was difficult to come to grips with. I found myself at a crossroads. I asked myself, " Should I teach without changing the existing situation or do I address the problem and find innovative ways to change my teaching environment, in order for cooperation and interaction to take place between my learners?"

My path was already laid out for me, because of my belief in education as a strategy for emancipation and liberation. Meerkotter and Van den Berg (1994) argue that education has to be viewed as a process which endeavors to emancipate or liberate people in such a way that they are able to take part meaningfully in all which enables them to live a full life. This I believe is my understanding of the purpose of education. Having this as my focal point, I could not accept the existing learning environment at my new school. The learners' education was not enabling them to become meaningful participants in society.

This thesis is about the investigation into my own classroom practice. It is based on a belief that interaction is an important part of not only education but also a means to

1

bridge the racial divide that exists in our classrooms and also in our society. The two racial groups in my classroom were not interacting with each other and my thesis investigates if cooperative learning as a strategy can bring about interracial interaction in my classroom.

My educational development

Education was always an important part of my life. My mother and father always encouraged my sister and I to learn and gain valuable knowledge so that we could contribute to the upliftment and development of our community. My father being an Anglican priest had always stressed the importance of social justice and the contribution of education in the fight against injustice. This sense of social justice became more clear and meaningful during the 1980s, when I was in secondary school in Mitchells Plain. It was during this period of my life that my political thought and my perception of the world started to take shape. Being involved in and part of People's Education classes during the 1980s gave me the awareness of how education can play an important role to change attitudes and beliefs that are designed to subjugate and oppress you. This I believe is what Meerkotter and Van den Berg meant when they say that education must be used as an instrument to empower for liberation.

I began my studies in 1989 at the University of the Western Cape. I was enrolled in the Faculty of Education. It was during this period of my life that my political thoughts were fine tuned and broadened. At the University of the Western Cape, I came into contact with ideas, people and writers that would have a profound influence on my life. It was at university where I started reading Freire, Shor, Meerkotter, Van den Berg and many other writers that would influence my understanding of education, the world and myself. Their ideas, ideals and principles still shape and guide my teaching and my life. Throughout this thesis I have made reference to these writers and educationists. Freire (1987) says that transformation can only be accomplished by those who dream about the reinvention of society. That dream exists with me daily.

2

My teaching career

The previous South African regime forcefully divided South Africans into different race groups. Each group had its own residential space. The majority of coloured, indian and black South Africans lived in townships outside the main cities of South Africa. Township life in South Africa is not an easy one. South African townships are saturated with drugs, gangs, crime, unemployment and all the social degradation that accompanies these ills of society. South African townships are also deeply rooted in segregation. Very little interracial interaction takes place inside South African townships. This has given rise to suspicion, racial stereotyping and ultimately racial hatred. Growing up in a coloured township never allowed me the freedom to interact with other racial groups. Coming from a coloured township, I wanted to make a positive contribution to the same environment that shaped me. I wanted to make a difference.

To this day, I believe that I was lucky to start teaching when I did. I began my teaching career when South Africa entered a new era of democracy and freedom. I began teaching in the 'transformation age'. It always amazes me that I was schooled and educated in apartheid South Africa and now I teach in a free and democratic South Africa.

I got my wish to teach on the Cape Flats, at a school in Mitchells Plain. Mitchells Plain is a racially created area of the Western Cape, specifically designed to house the coloured community of the Western Cape. Gangs, drugs, abuse and violence are rife and part of the daily life of those who live in Mitchells Plain. Mitchells Plain is deeply rooted in apartheid ideology, that stresses 'keep them separated and oppressed'. Being a teacher straight out of university with all the ideals and dreams of making a difference in a disadvantaged community, I plunged myself into the task of making a difference.

Because of my status as a temporary teacher I have taught at different schools on the Cape Flats. Temporary teachers are appointed on contract basis. These contracts are usually for short periods at a school. It is difficult for graduates fresh from university to

3

enter the education sector. For many graduates this is a trying period because of the instability that accompanies being a temporary teacher. Although this was a difficult period of my life, I am also grateful that I was able to teach at different schools, gaining valuable experience and discovering who I am and my place in education. I believe that I would not have gained such a vast amount of teaching experience and knowledge if I had entered the profession as a permanent teacher at my first school.

At all the schools where I have taught I always encouraged my learners to interact with one another and to actively participate in the lesson, especially encouraging them to ask questions and to express their own views. I have always wanted to know what my learners think and how they perceive things. Learners interacting with each other, discussing the work, debating and just talking to one another about ideas is what I believe education should be about.

I have always believed that in order for learning to take place and for it to be effective and meaningful, the learner must be actively involved in that learning process and experience. Learners need to question, discuss and debate the work they are doing. They need to challenge teachers and not merely accept what has been taught to them. By doing this they become participants in their own intellectual and educational development. Engaging with the work is of vital importance if learning is to take place. This belief forms the basis of my teaching. The encouragement of learners to interact with one another and to participate actively in the classroom is central to my teaching. Having this belief is not easy to put into practice. As my experience has taught me, children often resist active participation in the work that is being done in the class. This is extremely evident in township schools. They still see the teacher as the one with all the answers and very seldom offer their own views or ideas. It is therefore the task of the teacher to find and implement innovative ways to change this perception learners have about education. But I do believe that if teachers are persistent and innovative and there is encouragement from teachers for their learners to work together and participate then change will take place. A lesson that I have learnt through my experience at different schools is that

4

change takes time and should not be rushed. Getting learners interacting with one another and getting them to participate is a process. Freire (1987) warns us that teachers must not approach liberating education in an idealistic fashion. Freire is trying to tell us that we as teachers should not have unrealistic dreams and goals. We need to be aware that change does not happen over-night.

Delft South Primary

In January 2000, I finally became employed as a permanent teacher at Delft South Primary. This is the school where the research was conducted.

Delft South Primary is a unique school in the Western Cape. It is situated in a newly built area on the Cape Flats. Its inhabitants consist of two previously disadvantaged groups in the Western Cape, namely the Xhosa-speaking community and the coloured community. Previously these two groups were separated from each other through apartheid. With the advent of democracy, apartheid's divisions were challenged and these once exclusive communities became open for everyone. Delft South is such a new community. The Xhosa-speaking community has its own traditions and is grounded in its Xhosa culture. The coloured community of Delft South is mainly Afrikaans speaking and has a more westernised perspective of the world. These two groups have never previously coexisted within the same community. Their languages, cultures and traditions are different and they both have stereotypical knowledge of each other. Delft South is one of the few areas in the Western Cape, where these two communities live side-by-side. They share the same shops, sport facilities, churches, clinics and schools. Delft South is an impoverished, multicultural community.

The school was made up of Afrikaans, Xhosa and English speaking learners. The medium of instruction was English, even though English for many was a third or second

5

language. The school offered all three languages, but English was the first language. The staff at the school consisted of all three language groups.

I was excited to be part of this school because of what it stood for. For me, it was a school that was realising the multicultural dream of South Africa. I believed and still believe that I can make a contribution to realise the dream that most South Africans share of having a unified nation that celebrates its unity and also its diversity. Delft South Primary offered me this opportunity.

Coming from a teaching environment where I always encouraged learner interaction and participation, I intended doing the same at my new school. I wanted them to be active participants in their own learning experience. My first day in my classroom is a day that I will always remember. The first thing that grabbed my attention in the classroom was the physical seating of the learners. Learners were sitting two per table. They were seated in rows. This was strange to me coming from an environment where learners sat in groups of various sizes. But the strangest observation was yet to come.

Delft South Primary being a multi-racial school conjured up expected images of learners from different racial backgrounds mixing freely and interacting. This was not the case at the school. Maybe my expected experience was clouded with idealistic notions of unity and interaction, ignoring the reality that exists within the South African context. The school is a mere reflection of that which takes places in society. Learners in my classroom paired themselves with those who were from similar racial backgrounds. These children lived next to each other, played in the same streets and playgrounds, belonged to the same school and were in the same classroom, but they would not and sometimes refused to sit next to each other in the classroom. Xhosa-speaking learners sat next to each other and coloured learners sat next to each other. What I was seeing was not what I was expecting. Our country has moved away from a policy of apartheid and racial separateness and yet, in a community that prides itself on being multi-racial those differences were still prevalent and dominating the classroom dynamics. What was taking

6

place was not conducive for interactive learning. This environment that confronted me was not suited for the sharing of ideas, learning from each other and building positive peer relationships. Something had to be done in order to have an interactive environment, where learners have the freedom to interact with everyone in the classroom and actively participate in their own learning experience and where skin colour was not the determining factor where learners were seated.

Another observation I made during the first few weeks and months was the fact that when asked to discuss or interact, not all my learners became actively involved. Xhosa-speaking learners hardly participated in discussions or actively engaged with the lessons. My coloured learners were the ones participating and engaging in the subject matter. These few learners were making contributions in the classroom. This became a thorn in my side because I seemed to be making no progress with my Xhosa-speaking learners. I went over-and-over in my head what the possible reasons for this frustrating situation could be. I needed to understand why this was happening. Here are a few questions that plagued my thoughts during this period:

1. Is it a language problem? Do they have a problem understanding English or my accent?
2. Is it because I am a new teacher?
3. Is it because I am not Xhosa speaking and from a different racial background?
4. Am I a good teacher?

The last question was the most probing. It made me search the innermost part of myself. I questioned my reasons for being a teacher and whether I should be a teacher. It was one of the most difficult questions to answer and to contemplate. This period of my teaching career, I believe has been the hardest. Trying to understand myself in relation to what was happening within the classroom was not an easy task. I had two choices, to continue with the existing conditions in the classroom, where participation and interaction were very limited or to find a means to get my learners interacting and participating in class. I decided on the latter. I needed to change what was taking place in the classroom. I needed to change my teaching strategy and practice.

7

Enrolling in the Masters in Education Course in Action Research at the University of the Western Cape offered me the opportunity to explore possible ways to change my classroom practice. I wanted to find ways of getting my learners interacting with each other and participating actively within the classroom and in the lessons. My decision to do an action research project had a two fold purpose, to change my classroom practice and to get my learners interacting and participating, and to reaffirm my belief that education needed to be meaningful. Action research not only gave me that opportunity to research my own practice but it also provided me with the opportunity to improve and transform my own classroom.

Finding the appropriate strategy was not an easy task. I have always been a believer in and an advocate of groupwork. I have always encouraged groupwork in all my previous schools. I therefore decided to make use of groupwork as a means to get my learners working together. But ordinary groupwork was not what I needed. I needed something more that would change my existing environment where learners did not want to get involved with one another. I then decided to make use of cooperative learning, especially cooperative groupwork as a strategy to change the existing environment in the classroom. Cooperative groupwork is all about getting people to work together. Cowie et al (1994) argue that cooperative groupwork provides a setting where children can explore relationships with one another and can share issues in a trusting setting. They go further and say that the classroom is seen as a microcosm of society where children can come to learn about roles and relationships and learn about interactions which will stand them in good stead in their future lives as adults. I believe that cooperative groupwork offers us the opportunity to get learners from different class, language or race backgrounds, working together and interacting with each other. It also allows learners the opportunity to take part in their own learning experience and make contributions in the classrooms, to have their voices heard that are so often silent. Ainscow and Tweddle (1989), argue that learning is about taking risks and that people find it easier to take risks when they have the confidence that is often provided by sharing decisions and experiences with other people.

Central to the cooperative groupwork that I have implemented are two principles of cooperative groupwork that Conod (1997) speaks about, namely the principle of *heterogeneous grouping* and the principle of *positive interdependence*. Conod says that most effective groups are those that include learners with different backgrounds and he also says that learners need to recognise and value the interdependence on each other. Making sure that the groups were heterogeneous was important if the aim of the action research was to be realised. To make the learners interdependent was not that easy, but this will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

I made use of one grade seven, Natural Sciences class in this project. I structured my lessons in such a manner that promoted working together in the classroom. During this period I observed how my learners responded to what was being done in the classroom and I also interviewed my learners in order for them to share their experiences of what was taking place in the class, because it was meant to benefit them and what they thought was of vital importance.

This thesis is written in a very personal tone, because the issues I am writing about are very close to my heart. It is also written in this tone so that ordinary teachers who read this thesis would be able to understand it and relate to it. Wolcott (1994) says that researchers need to engage others to read their stories. I want to engage my colleagues and challenge them to also research their own practices.

Structure of thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter two discusses the literature that I have used in this thesis. Chapter three introduces and discusses action research and how it aids the reflective teacher in researching his or her own practice. Chapter four and five describe and discuss the data that has been collected. Chapter four discusses the data collected by means of observation and chapter five looks at the data collected by means

of the interviewing process. Chapter six is the final chapter, where the data is discussed and it is also the concluding chapter to this thesis.

<u>Conclusion</u>

This mini-thesis is the outcome of a journey that my learners and I have been on for two years. It is not only a journey started out of frustration and desperation but also out of hope.

10

Chapter 2

Cooperative learning: a strategy for interracial interaction

"All for one, one for all"

Alexander Dumas

Introduction

Education is not a practice that can be entered into uninformed. I believe that education should be an intellectual practice that is based on a well-informed body of knowledge. Education is all about strategies to improve the quality of learning, interaction and education of our learners. In order for these strategies to be successful, teachers need to be informed. Teachers need to know what they are teaching and why they are teaching it. They have to do research on whatever strategy they are trying to implement in their classroom. This chapter serves that purpose of documenting my research into cooperative learning as a strategy for interracial interaction. Chapter two will discuss the principles, philosophies and the implementation of cooperative learning and its relation to improving interracial interaction.

South African society has over a long period, been characterised by racial divisions. The Population Registration Act of 1950 classified each person according to racial criteria. The Group Areas Act stipulated separate residential areas for different racial groups. Schools were segregated by law (Christie, 1990: 43). South African education has always been at the forefront of political life in South African society and its history. It was education that was used as a tool to subjugate generations of non-white South Africans. That same education eroded and belittled the history, traditions, culture, language and values of the majority of South Africans. Education in apartheid South Africa justified and promoted the ideology of apartheid that prescribes to the belief that racial groups should be separated and kept apart, and that one racial group deserves the right to wield

11

power over the other racial groups. South African education has created the racial divisions that still exist today between the different racial groups in South Africa.

Those divisions were very much alive and evident in my school and in my classroom. Addressing the relationship between my Xhosa-speaking learners and my coloured learners was the purpose of this action research project. It was precisely the need to change the existing divisions between the two groups that drove my actions. I believe that education played its role in dividing this country, but I also believe South African society can be changed through education. Gillborn (1990) says that education has an obligation and opportunity to make a significant contribution towards the creation of a more just society. What was taking place in my school and in my classroom did not promote the values of a just society. These divisions still exist, not only in the classroom, but also in all spheres of South African life, and the question that Freire puts to us, *'What kind of politics am I doing in the classroom?'* confronts and challenges me daily. My conscience will not and cannot allow me to turn a blind eye and do nothing. I believe that we as teachers are challenged by the Preamble of our Constitution (1996) to heal the divisions of the past and to establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights. Apartheid education perpetuated inequality and like Christie, I believe that it is going to be education that will address and have to address the issues of change.

In the 'The Three Musketeers', Alexander Dumas uses the saying, *'All for one, one for all'*. This saying is the central theme that runs through the novel. It is a story about three soldiers whose duty it is to protect the king of France. Their motto is *'All for one, one for all'*. These soldiers come from different walks of life, but they have a common purpose, the protection of the king. The safety of the king depended heavily on how well these soldiers worked together, cooperated with one another, interacted and trusted each other.

Dumas's saying has been with me since I was a child, but it took on a new meaning when I read some literature on the Internet about cooperative learning. There in bold letters

stood Alexander Dumas's words, '*All for one, one for all*', introducing the reader to cooperative learning. Dumas's saying expresses what I wanted my learners to say and achieve. I wanted them to work together, to interact, in spite of their racial differences. Dumas's words express the true intent of cooperative learning, depending on each other and working together.

It is my aim in this chapter to explore and discuss the literature on cooperative learning and its relation to interracial interaction.

What is cooperative learning?

The first time I heard about cooperative learning, I proclaimed that I had always been doing it. It was only with closer scrutiny and by interacting with relevant resources that I came to accept that what I have been doing was not cooperative learning but ordinary groupwork. Groupwork has formed the basis of my teaching strategy. I believe that children learn best when working in groups. It is in groups that learners can talk to their peers about what is being done in the class. The group serves as a sounding board, where everyone can bounce off their understanding of the work. It is also a good place to discuss, debate and consolidate work that has been done. The safety of a small group to express one's knowledge and understanding is usually better than in a large class. So it was with great shock and surprise when I discovered that what I have been doing was not cooperative learning. Johnson and Johnson (1987), who have written a vast amount of literature on cooperative learning, explain that cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students can work together to maximise their own and each other's learning. They say there is a difference between putting learners into groups and structuring learners to cooperate and work together. Cooperative learning is not having learners sit together while each one is doing his or her own work and it is not about giving a mark to the whole group when only one worked or contributed in a group.
In my classroom, my groupwork was generally structured as a means for learners to discuss the work at hand and to interact with each other. Very little interaction actually

13

took place. Xhosa-speaking learners sometimes refused to take part, or only spoke Xhosa to fellow Xhosa-speaking group members. Coloured learners were always complaining that they were the only ones working in the group, or they refused to work in the group, because there were too many Xhosa-speaking learners in the group. Looking back, not much cooperative learning actually took place. This realisation was not an easy one to accept, but it had to be accepted if I wanted to make a change in the classroom and get my learners interacting. Accepting that one's teaching strategy and educational belief system is not working is not an easy thing to do. I needed to reassess my understanding of cooperative learning groups and this had to be done in order for me to start and complete my research project.

Christine Lee (1997) understands cooperative learning as organised and managed groupwork in which learners work cooperatively in small groups to achieve academic as well as effective social goals. My groupwork in the past was never organised or structured. Learners would go into their groups, and discuss a topic or workpiece, or they would do a task or project and a single mark would be given to everyone in the group. Not much organising, structuring and managing went into it. It was therefore important that the cooperative learning groups in this research project had to be structured and managed. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

Panitz (1996) describes cooperative learning as a set of processes that help people interact together in order to accomplish a specific goal. That interaction is what I have been searching for in my classroom. Very little interaction between the two racial groups was taking place, unless in conflict, arguments or fighting. The promise that with a well structured, organised and managed cooperative learning strategy interaction between my Xhosa speaking and coloured learners was possible was something that I could not ignore. In order for this to take place certain elements of cooperative learning had to be included in my cooperative learning strategy. In the next section I outline the elements of cooperative learning

14

The elements of cooperative learning

1. *Positive interdependence*

Positive interdependence is at the heart of cooperative learning. Ainscow and Tweddle (1989) explain positive interdependence as being when members of a group accept that they can achieve their own objectives only if other members achieve theirs. This is called the 'sink or swim together' factor (Johnson & Johnson, 1987: 12). Members in cooperative learning groups must work together if they intend making a success of their task or activity. The groupwork that I had been implementing in my classes were not structured with this essential element of positive interdependence. My learners were not interdependent on each other. I have discovered that because my usual groupwork lacked this element, a space was created for certain individual group members to ignore the group and carry on their own leaving the rest of the members just sitting there and not doing the work or not participating in the activity. It was everyone for themselves in the group. *'All for one, and one for all'* did not exist or mean anything in the groups. In order to change this, I needed to include this element of cooperative learning into my strategy in order for my learners to become more interdependent on each other. The Johnsons [online] argue that positive interdependence promotes the sharing of resources, mutual support and it celebrates joint success. It creates the perception that you are linked with others in such a way that you cannot succeed unless they do. This was much needed in my classroom. The two groups (Xhosa-speaking and coloured learners) regarded themselves as two distinct entities in the class. I wanted them to see themselves as one class and cooperative groupwork was the starting point for this much needed transformation.

This element, positive interdependence is critical to the success of cooperative learning groups. It creates the opportunity for all group members to become active contributors to the group.

15

2. *Face-to-face interaction*

Group members in cooperative learning groups need to interact with one another. They need to be talking to one another. Communication is important in cooperative learning groups. Even though positive interdependence is an essential element to cooperative learning, it is the interaction within the group that determines whether the outcomes have been achieved. The Johnsons (1987) argue that it is the interaction patterns and verbal interchange among students promoted by positive interdependence that affect educational outcomes. I not only wanted my learners to work together in order to complete an activity or task, but more important, I wanted them to interact and talk to one another.

Cowie et al (1994) say that children benefit from frequent opportunities to experience interactions within groups, they gain in self-confidence as they share ideas of mutual concerns and they widen their network of friendships. The network of friendships that existed in my classes was based on race and language. Friends and friendship were determined by the colour of your skin. This came out clearly during the interviews that I conducted with my learners and this issue will be discussed in Chapter 4. The element of face-to-face interaction is for me an important part of the cooperative learning experience. It is the talking, the cooperation and the interaction that are so important in cooperative learning groups. Cooperative learning groups have two functions, to work together and for group members to interact with one another.

3. *Individual accountability*

A problem that I have always encountered when doing groupwork in the class was the occurrence that not everyone in the group was working or participating. This has always been a stumbling block when assessment of the groupwork had to be done. An overall mark would be justified if everyone contributed and worked within the group, but in most cases only a few individuals completed the given activity or task. It would therefore be unfair to give an overall mark to the whole group, if everyone did not participate. It is for this purpose that the Johnsons (1987) included the element of individual accountability in cooperative learning. They emphasise that when cooperative learning groups are

16

engaged with any activity or task, every group member is responsible for the learning of the material. They stress that group members should be aware and it should be emphasised to them that they cannot 'hitch-hike' on the work of others. It is therefore important that when cooperative learning tasks or activities are done, these activities should be set up and structured in such a manner that all learners in the group have something to do and contribute within the group. My previous experience with groupwork had not been structured in this fashion and it created the space for certain individuals to do all the work in the group, while others sat back and watched.

4. *Interpersonal and small group skills*

Being in a group requires certain interpersonal and small group skills. Putting learners into groups and asking them to interact does not always have the desired outcomes. Many of my learners lack these interpersonal and group skills. They come from single parent homes, broken homes, gang-ridden neighborhoods, poverty stricken areas, abusive environments and many more negative situations that have a direct impact on how they perceive life and interact with others in the classroom. Add to that an environment that is still obsessed with racial stereotypes and you have a volatile classroom environment. The Johnsons [online] acknowledge that these interpersonal and group skills are a necessity in having quality cooperative learning groups. Learners must be taught these skills and also be motivated to use them. They need these skills for interacting effectively with their peers. Placing socially unskilled learners in a learning group and telling them to cooperate will not be successful (Johnson & Johnson, 1987: 13). This I have discovered in many of the groupwork situations that I have introduced and implemented in the classroom. Group members were forever arguing and fighting, and these tensions caused many conflict and confrontational situations to flare up and consume the whole group. Many of my learners had great difficulty in working in groups because of the lack of interpersonal and small group skills. I have come to realise that before one embarks on a cooperative learning activity, it is important to acquaint learners with the skills that are needed to engage productively in a cooperative learning group. These skills are of vital

17

importance and learners must be taught what these skills are and how to make use of them and they should be constantly reminded of them.

These four elements are the backbone of cooperative learning. Various literature sources have based their understanding of cooperative learning on them. They have been the elements that my cooperative learning project is grounded on.

Another key issue in my research is ethnicity. In the next part of this chapter I will discuss cooperative learning and its relation to ethnicity and racial interaction.

Cooperative learning and ethnicity

According to Cowie et al (1994), many studies have been conducted on attitudes and relationships among children of different ethnic racial groups. In most cases, the findings were that children tend to gravitate towards members of their own particular race or ethnic group. This was quite evident in my classroom. Those who were coloured seemed more comfortable interacting with their fellow coloured learners. The same was evident with my Xhosa-speaking learners.

Cowie et al (1994) also speak about ethnic and racial groups having negative attitudes about other ethnic and racial groups. This was also very much evident in my classrooms and my school. Many times learners would say negative things about members of another race. Cowie et al quote an earlier study done in the USA, by Radke, Sutherland and Rosenberg in 1950 that found that ethnic majority children have a much more favourable view of their own racial group than that of other ethnic groups.

For many, race and ethnicity have become words that should not be used at all in a democratic South Africa. Many have proclaimed that South Africans should forget about the past and focus their attention on the present and the future. This is a belief that I

18

cannot prescribe to. The results of the past confront me daily. The created division within the classroom forced me to see the legacy that apartheid has left us. We might find ourselves in a democratic South Africa, but we still have the apartheid mentality of seeing each other as different and strange and because of these existing perceptions, very little interaction between the racial groups actually takes place.

Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) say that race is a factor that shapes human experience and that we as human beings have made race an important factor in our lives. According to Banks (1984), research has consistently shown that very young children are aware of racial differences. He quotes studies done by researchers such as Kenneth Band, Mamie Clark, Mary Ellen Goodman and J Kenneth Morland. He says that children learn about race long before they enter school from their parents, television and movies.

As South Africans I believe we cannot hide or run away from our past. We need to confront it head on and set our sights on the process of transformation and change. I believe that this is my reason for taking on this action research project. I cannot sit idly by and watch how racial divisions consume my classroom. Challenging the existing status quo was not an option, it was a necessity. Freire's central premise is that education is not neutral and does not take place in a vacuum (Wallerstein, 1987: 33). Van den Berg and Meerkotter (1994) echo what Freire is saying in a paper read in 1988, that says that teaching does not take place in a vacuum. Because of our history, we are a nation obsessed with race. This obsession has permeated and infiltrated every part of South African life. Gillborn (1990) argues that we cannot understand life in multi-ethnic schools without reference to racial inequalities at work in society as a whole. He says that these inequalities are brought into the school and modified, re-created or reinforced. What Banks and Gillborn are speaking about is the reality I find myself in. Apartheid has scarred South Africans. My learners might not have lived during the days of oppression and segregation, but they do reflect the embedded prejudices and racial contestation of their parents. These feelings are seen in their homes, townships and cities and claimed and enacted in the classroom. South African society is saturated with racial inequalities,

19

racial stereotypes and racial divisions. The introduction of cooperative learning in the classroom is my attempt to break this cycle of division and set in motion a process of change.

The promise of cooperative learning

Many claims and promises have been made regarding the success of cooperative learning in improving the quality of interaction in the classroom and the enhancement of friendships in racially, heterogeneous classrooms. Cowie et al (1994) say that numerous studies of friendship between students of different backgrounds have confirmed that those students in cooperative learning classrooms are more likely to make friendship choices outside their own ethnic group than learners who have been taught in the traditional teaching mode. She quotes research done in 1990 by Sharan that puts forward the positive effects of cooperative learning on the improvement of friendships in ethnically heterogeneous classrooms. She says that these studies seem to provide strong evidence that through intensive, regular cooperative contact among children from different ethnic backgrounds, real and lasting friendships can be forged and a significant reduction in prejudice among those involved can be achieved. In an online article (author unknown) it is claimed that cooperative learning has been associated with gains in achievement, interpersonal skills and attitudes toward school, self and others. The article quotes Shachar and Sharan (1994) explaining that cooperative groups provide a more intimate setting that permits such direct and unmediated communication. According to Ainscow and Tweddle (1989), cooperative learning encourages learners to work together and to support one another. Johnson and Johnson (1987) say that over five hundred experimental and one hundred correlation studies have been conducted during the past ninety years on cooperative learning. They claim that cooperative learning promotes a culturally plural society within the classroom.

The elements of cooperative learning also gave me hope that this learning strategy would be best suited to address the lack of interracial interaction taking place in my classroom.

Structuring positive interdependence into my cooperative learning lessons and groups would enhance the idea that my learners needed each other. It was this particular element of cooperative learning that got me interested in this educational strategy. My learners did not want to work together. Structuring the lessons and the groups in such a manner that they needed each other was a brilliant strategy to get them interacting and participating. An example of this would be ensuring that everyone in the group had something to do and that in order for the group to achieve its goal, everyone was needed.

The element of face-to-face interaction was something I usually overlooked when doing groupwork. It is often taken for granted that learners in groups talk to each other. By structuring your lesson in such a manner that ensures face-to-face interaction enables learners to really talk to each other.

Ainscow and Tweddle (1989) say that the cooperative learning approach should be used whenever teachers want learners to like each other better and to learn more effective social skills. Cowie et al (1994) write that cooperative groupwork can be part of any subject where there is some issue that can be explored. The issue of interracial interaction was being explored and encouraged through this research. The Johnsons (online) say that cooperative learning teaches the values that people who are different are to be valued. What they are saying was that everyone is of equal value, equally deserving, regardless of their gender, ethnic group, culture, social class or language. These were the values I envisioned my learners to learn and have. I therefore could not allow this opportunity of not introducing them to cooperative learning.

Being confronted by these claims and promises about the results of cooperative learning, I needed no more encouragement to engage this educational approach. The promise of getting my learners working together and interacting was all I needed. For me I had no choice, I needed to explore this avenue of education.

Implementing cooperative learning

Cooperative learning has to be carefully planned and implemented. Johnson and Johnson (1987) recommend that teachers need to adopt an attitude of experimentation and this they argue would ensure the fine-tuning of this strategy. Ainscow and Tweddle (1989) stress that in order for cooperative learning to be effective it has to be planned, implemented and monitored very carefully. They say that an ideological commitment to the idea of cooperative learning is not enough. They therefore recommend that when engaging in cooperative learning it needs to be done in a systematic and coordinated way. This view of cooperative learning is one shared by many who have written about cooperative learning and it is an aspect of cooperative learning that I have come to understand and appreciate while conducting this action research project.

During the planning and implementation stages of cooperative learning the following points need to be looked at and addressed.

1. Objective for the lesson

Johnson and Johnson (1987) emphasise the importance of having objectives for the cooperative learning lesson. It is important to know the purpose of the lesson or the cooperative learning activity. They specify that a teacher needs two types of objectives when planning for cooperative learning groups, an academic objective and a collaborative skills objective. Academic objective concerns itself with the academic part of the lesson. Its concern will be about what the learners need to know in relation to the academic part of the lesson. Cooperative skills objective sets the scene and the tone of the lesson in terms of what you as the teacher would like to see with regard to learners learning the skills needed to work cooperatively together.

2. Choosing appropriate cooperative learning activities and relevant materials

Choosing the appropriate activity is an important part of the cooperative learning process and experience. It is the activity that would allow for the interaction and cooperation to

occur within the group. Cowie et al (1994) say that the activity that is chosen should promote the following values: sensitivity to others, a willingness to listen, supportiveness, the freedom to take risks, tolerance for all contributions and should also involve frequent opportunities to reflect on and evaluate shared experience. Being aware of all these values places great emphasis on choosing the relevant materials to complement these values. Ainscow and Tweddle (1989) comment that where written materials are to be used as part of the groupwork, these materials must be carefully selected and presented. They have based this on the work of Lunzer and Gardner (1984) in which they recommend how groups of learners work collaboratively to gain meaning from written materials. In a teacher's manual for multicultural education, Lemmer and Squelch (1993) also advise teachers about the importance of choosing the appropriate instructional activity and the related materials. It is important to choose activities and materials that will encourage and promote interactive learning in the classroom. The activities should also allow everyone to participate in the group. What I have discovered in my classes is that most of my learners are stimulated by visual materials. I therefore always make sure that materials are visual and graphic in nature. Activities and materials are essential components for a successful cooperative learning lesson.

3. Determining group size

Race (2000) says that the benefit of the learners working together depends significantly on the size of the group. According to him the size of the group must also be appropriate to the tasks involved as well as to the nature of the individuals constituting the group. Each group size brings along its own advantages and disadvantages. Johnson and Johnson (1987) say that cooperative learning groups tend to range in size from two to six. They advise teachers to start with pairs or threesomes and as the learners become more experienced and skilled they would be able to manage larger groups.

4. Assigning learners to groups

This is an issue that came up frequently in my action research project. I have always been a believer in the learner having the right to choose his or her own group. Through this

cooperative learning experience my perception of learners choosing their own groups has changed. I still believe that there are times for learners to choose their own groups, but for the sake of this project and the objective of getting my learners interacting, I had to place them in their groups. Johnson and Johnson recommend that teachers maximise the heterogeneity of learners (1987: 47). I had to do the placing if I wanted interracial interaction.

5. *Creating a climate for cooperation*

Lang, McBeath and Hébert (1995) say that the best way to prepare your learners to acquire cooperative learning skills is to build a classroom climate conducive to trust and cooperation. This they argue is possible by gradually introducing cooperative learning activities, thereby helping your learners to acquire communication and cooperative skills. Creating the right setting is something I have always believed in when it comes to teaching. Learners need to feel that they are in an environment that allows them the opportunity to be interactive, not only with the teacher, but also with fellow learners in the classroom. Creating an interactive environment and setting the right climate conducive for cooperation and interaction is important.

Ledlow (1995) of Arizona State University agrees with the notion that setting a classroom climate is important. She says that the first step in having a cooperative learning class is to create a classroom climate that encourages cooperation. She says that teachers need to communicate clear expectations to learners about cooperative learning. So often we as teachers assume that our learners know what is expected of them and many times this assumption leads to disappointment when they do the opposite. Ainscow and Tweddle (1989) agree that learners need to understand the nature and the purpose of the activities that they are engaged in. Sharing this information with your learners allows for a better understanding of the objectives, which are to cooperate and interact with each other. Through this action research project, I have come to realise the importance of communicating the objectives and the expectations to my learners. Lang, McBeath and Hébert (1995) echo similar sentiments, when they say that it is important to explain to

each group the procedures required for task completion and role expectations. Explaining the intended outcomes of the lesson increases the likelihood that learners will focus on the relevant concepts, information and objectives of the activity (Johnson & Johnson, 1987: 52).

6. Observing the cooperative groups

Johnson and Johnson (1987) say that the teacher's role begins in earnest when the cooperative learning groups start to work. They say that much of the teacher's time should be spent observing group members. Lang et al (1995) go a little further when they say that cooperative learning provides opportunities to observe, reflect and intervene supportively. The process of observation in this study is explained in more detail in Chapter four.

Cooperative learning, I have discovered, is not something that one just implements in the classroom. The complexity of this teaching strategy means that one must engage in thorough planning and structuring of the intended cooperative learning activities. I believe the above six essential points of planning and implementation give teachers the opportunity to ensure that effective cooperative learning groups operate within classrooms.

Cooperative learning and collaborative learning

During my literature search, I came across writers who advocate collaborative learning instead of cooperative learning. I have included some of their ideas in this chapter in order to allow the reader to have an insight into current debates around cooperative learning.

Wiersema (2000), of Mexico City sees cooperative learning as just a technique designed to get learners working together in order to finish a certain product. He introduces us to collaborative learning and says that collaboration refers to the whole process of learning,

where learners teach each other and the teacher also learns from the learners. The elements of collaborative learning are similar to cooperative learning. The teacher is seen as a guide to his or her learners. Panitz (1996) understands collaborative and cooperative learning in the following manner. He sees collaboration as a philosophy of interaction and personal style, whereas cooperation is a structure of interaction designed to facilitate the accomplishment of the end product. He says that cooperative learning is more directive and closely controlled by the teacher.

Collaborative learning as a personal philosophy of working together is what my expectation would always be for my learners, but it is something that would require more time. The legacy of separation and mistrust is still strong and obstructs the process of complete interracial interaction. It is therefore important, I believe that cooperative learning be the technique to get my learners interacting in a controlled environment where they can learn to work together and gain that much needed interpersonal skills for collaborative learning

Conclusion

The South African classroom today is very different from the classrooms of apartheid South Africa. Today learners of the different racial groups sit side-by-side in the classroom, something unheard of during the 60's, 70's and 80's. Our classrooms reflect the diversity of our nation. However years of segregation have led to a situation that we do not know each other and it has led to mistrust and group exclusivity. This is what was happening in my classroom. Interaction between the racial groups (coloured and Xhosa-speaking) was at a minimum. It was a situation that needed to be changed. I believed that through cooperative learning I could begin with that transformation. By working in small, heterogeneous groups, learners would be interacting with one another. Cooperative learning was seen as a way to create that opportunity to interact, to communicate and to share. Throughout this action research project my vision has always been the bringing

26

together of a divided classroom. Cooperative learning I believe can help bring about that change.

In the next chapter I will discuss why I chose to make use of action research. I will also be discussing what it means to be a reflective teacher and its importance in our South African classrooms.

Chapter 3
Action research and the reflective teacher

Introduction

Classrooms and classroom practices need to reflect and embody the noble ideals of any given society. South African life in post – apartheid South Africa is based on the premise that we are one unified nation within our racial diversity. This ideal has been expressed through various forms - sport, politics, entertainment, etc. It is therefore an ideal that needs to be expressed and encouraged in our educational practices.

Confronting me in my classroom was a situation, which was contrary to this noble ideal. My Xhosa and coloured learners were not interacting with each other, unless in conflict with each other. Learners of these two groups congregated within their confined racial groupings and seldom ventured into each other's space, either in the classroom or on the playground. Seeing this phenomenon taking place in my classroom forced me to rethink my teaching practice. Something had to be done to change what was taking place.

Every day teachers confront a challenge when they walk into a classroom. Education is such a dynamic institution that challenges teachers on a daily basis. How teachers react to these challenges is of vital importance. Teachers are creators of their own environments. How they react and act upon their environment determines their productivity and their desired outcomes.

This chapter deals with the reflective teacher taking charge of his or her own practice. It advocates the understanding that teachers are the best people to research their own practices and learning environment. This chapter will also introduce the practice of action research and explain how I have used it as a means to understand my own teaching practice and attempt to change my practice in order to maximise the interaction between the two races in my classroom.

28

The reflective teacher and the culture of inquiry

In 1992, a groundbreaking document was released that envisaged an education system for a free, democratic South Africa, and in it says;

> ...changes in curriculum policy need to include measures to increase teacher participation in curriculum development and to improve classroom practices.

[National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), 1992, 25]

NEPI saw the teacher as an important stakeholder in education and as an agent for transformation. In order for the dream of freedom and democracy to be realised, teachers were needed to aid this transformation process, especially in the classroom. Where else would we start to realise this dream, but in the classroom? The classroom is where we need to light the fire of freedom, democracy, non-racialism and national unity. NEPI encouraged the teaching fraternity to support and establish a culture of inquiry that seeks to understand their own practices.

Brubacher, Case and Reagan (1994) define inquiry as an attempt to make sense of the world around us. They say that in education virtually all research and inquiry is ultimately concerned with the improvement of teaching and learning.

Loughran (1999) says that teachers often perceive that researching teaching is the domain of academics that are usually far removed from the actual classrooms. What Loughran is saying reflects the perception of classroom research in many schools around South Africa. Teachers would rather wait on 'hand-outs' from 'experts' outside of the classroom, resulting in disappointment when the methods and information fails. No two classrooms are the same and a 'one size, fits all' method very seldom works. Teachers need to explore, research and understand their particular context in which they teach.

Going hand in hand with the culture of inquiry is the teacher who reflects on his or her own practice. Markham (1999) writes that in the last twenty years there has been an increase in the adoption of reflection as a guiding principle in teacher education

29

programs. This reflection on one's teaching, according to Markham has meant anything from general discussion of teacher methods and motivations, to analysis of the formal aspect of teaching techniques. Zeichner and Liston (1996) say that not all thinking about teaching constitutes reflective teaching. They argue that if a teacher never questions the goals and the values that guide his or her work, the context in which he or she teaches, or never examines his or her assumptions, then that teacher is not engaging in reflective teaching. Zeichner and Liston say that a reflective practitioner is someone who examines his or her own motivations and also the context in which the problem occurs. The reflective practitioner would then design an intervention for the situation at hand. He or she would also be involved in questioning his or her own beliefs, values and orientations.

My classroom environment of little interracial interaction propelled me to reflect on my own teaching practice. I had to examine my beliefs and values, not only as a teacher but also as a South African, who believes in a unified, non-racial South Africa. I had to examine my purpose for being a teacher. I needed to first do some soul searching. I needed to know who I was in this multi-racial context. I even went so far as to question if I wanted to be at the school. Throughout all this soul searching and contemplation, my belief in a unified, non-racial South Africa always came to the fore. My beliefs and dreams for South Africa guided me. I had to do something in order to realise a unified classroom. Finally I had to develop a plan of action, in order to transform my teaching practice and the classroom environment. Cooperative learning and action research became my vehicles to try and bring about interracial interaction. I believe NEPI envisioned this when it spoke about teacher inquiry.

Education in South Africa is undergoing a dramatic change. We have now a unified education system that was once divided. Schools today are multi-lingual and multi-racial. These changes have impacted on the teaching profession. Teachers are now confronted with larger classes, multi-lingual and multi-racial classes. It cannot be business as usual in the classroom. Teachers need to engage and reflect on their own practices because of the change that has taken place. Inquiry should be an integral part of teaching. Learning how to reflect upon one's practice is an essential component of education.

30

Action research

Just thinking about your practice won't change it. There needs to be a practical side to your reflective inquiry. You need to design an intervention strategy to bring about that change.

Action research presented itself to me as a means to investigate my practice. It allowed me the opportunity to research and change my practice in order that this noble ideal of interaction within our diversity can be made a reality.

Action research is all about researching one's practice with a view to improving it. I needed to research my practice so that I could understand why learners were not interacting and come up with ways and methods in order to bring about a learning environment that would propagate and encourage that much needed interaction and participation in the classroom. Action research offered me such an opportunity.

The essence of action research locates itself in the understanding of and seeking to solve problems of those involved in the practice of teaching. Central to action research is the belief that the practitioner, the teacher, is the best person to research his or her own practice. McNiff (1988) argues that action research approaches education as a unified exercise, seeing the teacher in class as the best judge of his or her total educational experience. This allows the teacher to be actively involved in his or her own practice. Carr and Kemmis (1986) put it quite nicely when they say that action research is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out.

Action research places the teacher at the centre of the research process. The teacher needs to be actively involved in his or her own transformation process. It is a transformative process because the purpose of any action research project has as its conclusion the ideal to change the existing practice. Davidoff (1993) says that action research seeks to engage

31

teachers actively in a process of transformation towards becoming more critical and creative in their work. I needed to be critical of my practice in order for me to change it and I also needed to be creative in order to change my classroom environment to one that encouraged and stimulated learner interaction and participation.

Hopkins (1985) writes that action research combines a substantive act with a research procedure. He says it is a personal attempt at understanding, while engaged in a process of improvement and reform. It is this personal attempt that has drawn me to action research. Action research allows me to be part of the research conducted in my own classroom and it also allows me to be part of the transformative process that is taking place in the classroom. It is this hands-on approach to improving your existing environment that makes action research such a suitable approach to researching my classroom situation.

Hopkins (1985) quotes Ebbutt (1983) saying that action research is about the systematic study of attempts to improve educational practice by means of their own practical actions and by means of their own reflection upon the effects of those actions. Like Kemmis, Ebbutt also places the teacher, the practitioner at the center of this classroom research. Who else would be best suited to do the research than the teacher himself or herself. And this is the theme that runs through all action research literature, the notion of the 'teacher-researcher'.

Kemmis summarizes his approach to action research in the model shown in Figure 1. Kemmis' action research spiral shows the systematic processes of action research. The first step (Plan) is recognising and identifying the problem and setting out your plan of action. Step two is the implementation of your plan of action (Action). Step 3 centres around observing what is taking place during and after the implementation (Observe). During the fourth step one reflects on what has taken place (Reflect). After reflecting on what has been observed, the action research spiral starts all over again, taking into consideration the aspects that you have observed and have reflected upon and this forms part of your revised plan. Hopkins (1985) says that Kemmis' model is an excellent basis

32

for starting to think about what action research involves. Throughout my action research project into learner interaction, I followed these basic tenets that Kemmis has laid down. I first identified the problem that my learners' were not interacting and participating in the classroom. I then started planning my strategy to get them interacting and participating. The observation of my plan of action followed and then I reflected on what I observed and this guided my reworking of my original plan and strategy, thus beginning the cycle over again.
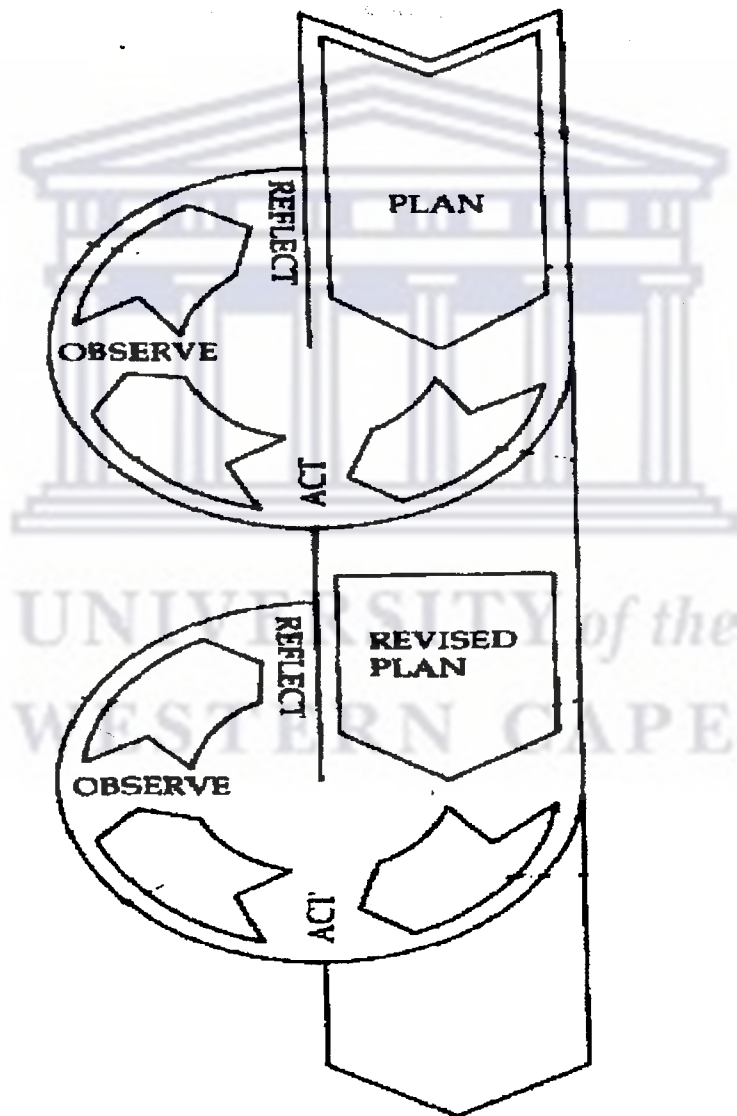
Fig. 1

Although I have used Kemmis' model of action research as a basis for my research, I have through my literature review come across another model of action research as laid out by Dave Ebbutt. Ebbutt says that the spiral is not the most useful metaphor to be used when describing the process of action research. He argues that an appropriate way to conceive the process of action research would be to think of it as comprising a series of, what he calls, successive cycles, each incorporating the possibility for the feedback of information within and between cycles (Hopkins, 1985, 35). Although the diagram is not as simplistic as Kemmis' model, it has the basic tenets of action research in it and shows the systematic manner in which action research needs to be conducted. Although I have been intrigued by Ebbutt's model of action research, I have not made use of it in this research project. I have included it in this thesis for future reference in action research studies.
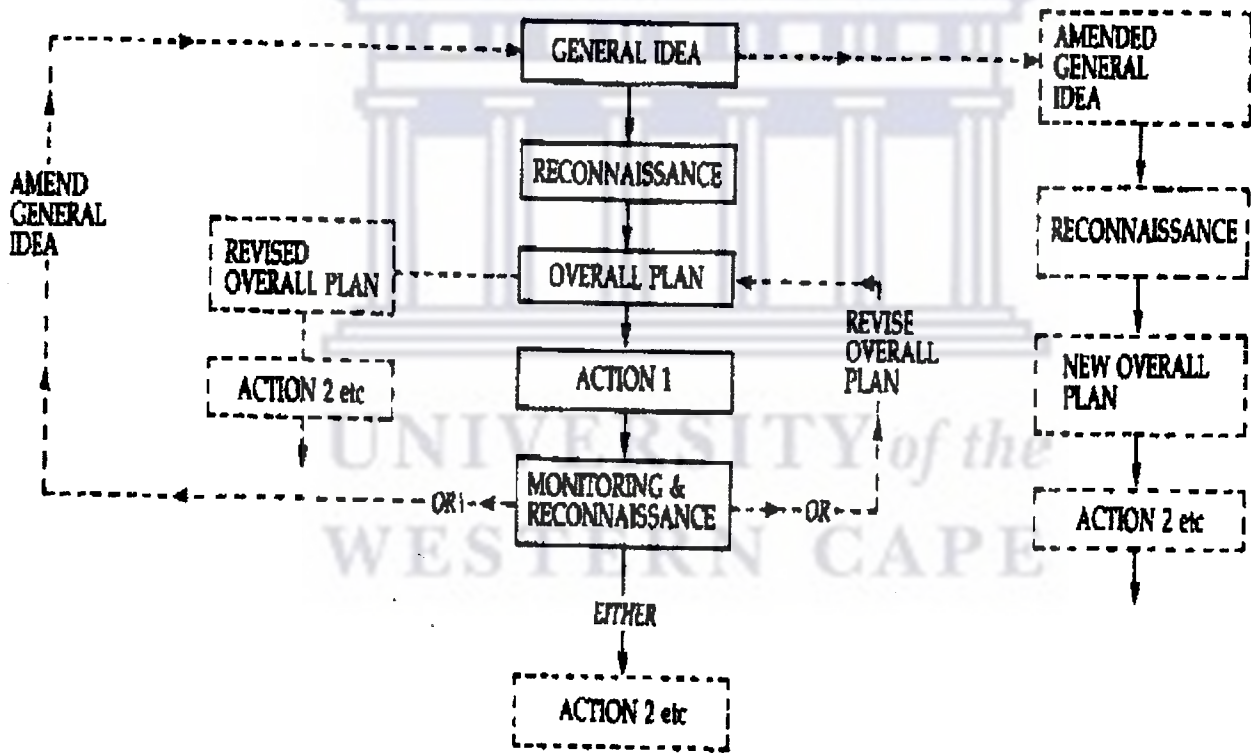
Idealized Representation of the Process of Action Research

Ebbutt's model

Fig. 2

Conclusion

I believe that in post-apartheid South Africa, we as teachers do have the freedom and the encouragement to become reflective teachers. We have the opportunity to critically look at our practices and try to understand them; we have the freedom to change our teaching practice in order that our learners benefit. Our democratic environment allows us to become reflective teachers in order for growth, change, development and improvement to take place. Change cannot take place if we as teachers do not reflect and understand where we are coming from and where we are going to.

Action research I believe is one of the vehicles that can bring about reflectivity in education. Many teachers still believe that change comes from the outside in the form of experts. This perception is partly to blame for many inappropriate and ineffective methods and practices that are currently taking place in the many of the classrooms around South Africa. No two classrooms are alike; no two schools are alike. Van den Berg (2001) says that action research is based on the notion that local conditions can vary widely and that the solution to many problems is not found by the handing down of universal solutions, which seldom work. A single method or practice might work in one class or school, but it might not be successful in another. The teacher must engage his or her own practice. Action research allows the teacher to plan, to put that plan into action, to observe what is taking place, to reflect on what was observed and to revise and maybe to rethink that initial plan. This is what I believe is what a reflective teacher should be doing. Fostnot says that an empowered teacher is a reflective decision maker who finds joy in learning and investigating the teaching/learning process. (Brubacher, Case & Reagan, 1994, 19)

In chapter four and five, I will be discussing my research that I have done in my classroom. The processes of observation and interviewing will be presented and discussed in these two chapters

Chapter 4

Implementing cooperative learning in the classroom

Introduction

Implementation and observation were two of the essential components of my action research project. The aim of the research was to find out if cooperative groupwork would encourage learners from two previously disadvantaged communities to work together and interact with one another. This chapter deals with the practical side of the research project, the implementation of cooperative groupwork in my classroom and the observation of how my learners responded to this strategy to get them cooperating and interacting.

This chapter is divided into three parts. Part one discusses the data gathering technique of observation. Part two deals with implementation and observation done in September 2000. This was my first cycle in my action research project. The third part (cycle 2) deals with the implementation and observation that was done during the first quarter of 2001.

Each cycle had a number of lessons (sessions), where cooperative groupwork formed the basis of the lesson that was done in the classroom. The data that was gathered was collected by means of observation.

Observation

The decision about how to gather the data for this project was a given. Observing my learners in action was the means by which I could collect valuable data. Bell (1999) says that observation is a technique that often reveals the characteristics of groups or individuals, which would have been impossible to discover by other means. I wanted to

36

see if the cooperative groupwork was going to create that environment that would stimulate interracial interaction and participation in the classroom.

Deciding on observation, as a primary method of data gathering was a simple task, but doing the observation was not as simple. My understanding of the observation process prior to implementing this data gathering technique was one of just watching what the learners would be doing. Burnaford (2001) quotes the philosopher Goethe saying that the hardest thing to see is what's in front of our eyes. She says that there is a need for teacher researchers to learn how to look. I have come to understand that observation is more that just observing what is taking place.

Evertson and Green (1986) divide observation into two types. The first is systematic observation that is undertaken not to answer a specific question, but it is done to establish, maintain, check, suspend and participate in everyday events. The second type of observation is deliberate and systematic observation. This type of observation, they argue, answers a stated question. They say deliberate and systematic observation must be a conscious process that can be explained so that others may assess its adequacy and understand the process. They say that it is important to know why you are doing the observation and the purpose for the observation. This type of observation is formal in structure and situation specific. Wragg (1994) points out that classroom observation should suit its purposes. The purpose, timing and context of an observation should largely determine its methods. Observation should therefore be systematic and structured.

Evertson and Green (1986) say that the observer is the first instrument of observation. Bell (1999) differentiates between a non-participant observer and a participant observer. Participant observation is when the observer is part of that which he or she is observing. Non-participant observers are those observers who are not part of that which they are observing. Investigating my own practice made me automatically a participant and part of the investigation.

37

I soon discovered that observation demanded more from me than just watching my learners. My observation needed to be structured. Wragg (1994) writes that one of the problems that faces both experienced and inexperienced classroom observers is the matter of deciding what should be the focus of attention. Knowing what your are looking for is of much importance to the research. I knew that I needed to observe if my learners were working together and that I needed to have a structured way of seeing this. During the beginning stages of this research I dabbled with different observation schedules. These schedules were drawn up to assist me in observing what was taking place in my classroom. Examples of these schedules can be found in Appendix B. These schedules are what Evertson and Green (1986) call category systems. It has preset categories and focuses on behaviour in general. Through this data gathering process I have found that these observation schedules were not best suited for this project. Although it focussed on the interaction between Xhosa-speaking and coloured learners, it did not allow me to explain what was taking place within the group. I therefore decided to explore another observation technique, called a narrative system as explained by Evertson and Green. This is an open system, with no preset categories. It is a written account of what the investigator sees, hears, experiences and thinks in the course of collecting data for reflecting. Evertson and Green(1986) say that the narrative system is concerned with obtaining detailed descriptions in order to explain unfolding processes and to identify generic principles and patterns of behaviour within specific events. An example of the narrative system can also be found in the appendix.

Being a participant observer is not an easy task. A problem that I encountered during my observation was the difficulty of being both the researcher, who is observing and the practitioner, who is trying to implement a new strategy. An example of this was when a group asked me to explain something to them and I had to stop with the observation and address that particular issue. This caused lots of frustration because it resulted in a stop-and-go situation.

Another problem that I encountered was the size of the class. I could not observe the whole class. There were different groups and it was difficult to observe all of them at the

38

same time. I intended to approach another teacher to help me with the observation, but due to the lack of extra staff members, no one was available to assist me. I therefore decided to focus my attention on a few groups during the sessions.

Being unobtrusive and unnoticed in the classroom was and is not an easy task, especially if it is your own classroom. In the beginning I was not sure where I should stand, at the back, in front or whether I should be walking around. Bell (1999) says that an observer can never pass entirely unnoticed, but that the aim is to be as unobtrusive as possible so that the observed behaviour is as close to normal as possible. Croll (1986) says that the observer will have to organise his or her presence in the classroom so that accurate observation can take place.

Observing my learners has been a learning experience and I have come to understand that observation is not just about watching. It needs to be structured and focussed. Part two and three of this chapter follows next and these are the descriptions of the observations that were undertaken in my Natural Science classroom.

Cycle 1
(September 2000)

During September 2000, I was presented with an opportunity to conduct some research in my classroom. The research was for an assignment for one of my M.Ed. courses. The assignment was designed to help and inform us on the research instruments that we were going to use in our research project. It was meant to pilot our research instruments and also to familiarise ourselves with the various instruments that we were going to use in our research projects. Because I was already familiar with my research topic, I decided to make use of the opportunity to start with my research project.

I decided to make use of the Grade 7A class. The reason for choosing this particular class were; they had the most coloured learners out of all the grade seven classes that I taught

and they were also the class where racial conflict was frequent. Arguments between the two groups often occurred in this particular class. Another reason for choosing this class was that I had a good relationship with the learners and therefore I felt comfortable with doing cooperative learning with them.

There were forty-eight learners in the Grade 7A class. Twenty-seven learners were female and twenty-one were male. Their ages were between twelve and seventeen years old. There were eighteen coloured learners and thirty Xhosa-speaking learners in the Grade 7A class.

Session I

A sense of excitement and fear engulfed me when I walked into the classroom on Thursday, 24 August 2000. I was excited because I was finally starting to work on my thesis. All I wanted to do was to get started. Accompanying that ecstatic emotion of excitement was that nagging feeling of fear. The kind of fear that makes you wonder if that which you are embarking on is the right thing to do and whether you have made the right choices. There also existed the fear of failure. All these emotions engulfed me when I entered Grade 7A's classroom.

I informed the Grade 7A's that we were going to do some groupwork and that they needed to divide themselves into groups of six. I wanted them to feel comfortable in their groups and therefore I did not put them in groups. I emphasised the importance of choosing group members not on the basis of friends, language or race. I explained to them that they needed to choose people who would be a benefit to the group and that sometimes it's not always good to have friends in groups.

While they were getting into their different groups, I observed that my learners were not adhering to the instructions that I had given them. They were grouping themselves on the basis of race and gender. Boys and girls grouped themselves within their respective gender and Xhosa and coloured learners stayed within their respective race groups.

40

At this point I wanted to jump in and say, 'Stop, you are doing it all wrong.' I decided to let it go and to observe what was taking place in the classroom. I did not want to be seen as an authoritarian teacher in any way. I felt that democracy in the classroom was an essential part of a healthy class and that learners must have the freedom to express themselves and also be comfortable to choose next to whom they want to sit. I wanted the two racial groups to mix and interact completely, but I also felt that this interaction needed to come from both groups and that I should not be forcing interaction on them. I wanted a genuine interaction and not a superficial one. At this point of the project I did not want to put learners in groups. Putting learners in groups, for me meant taking away the essence of democracy, the freedom to choose. '

Observing what was taking place conflicted with what I believed. I wanted my learners to interact with each other. I wanted them to discuss the work in groups. I wanted them to mix and work together. I believed that by allowing them the freedom to choose and with a little bit of encouragement to work together, they would make that change and form integrated groups. I left the classroom, not disappointed that the exercise did not work, but with a sense of urgency to find new strategies to get my learners to work together.

Session II

Before going into session II, I had to assess the previous session. Session II took place Monday, 28 August 2000. What I intended to take place in the previous session did not happen. The groups were still racially divided and I still got the sense that not much interaction regarding the actual task was done in the groups. Discussions were taking place in the group but I felt that the discussions were not always about the work being done. I decided to focus my attention on the aspect of getting the racial groups in the class to mix and work together.

During the first ten minutes of the period, I spoke to the class about the importance of working together as a group. I spoke about how working together could help and aid learners in understanding the work much better. I also emphasised the importance of how learners should choose their fellow group members and that friends are not always the

41

best choice. We spoke about the uniqueness of the school, where two previously disadvantaged communities live side-by-side and share the same resources and that the school is a mirror of the South African society and that if the school cannot succeed in bringing these two communities together, then there would be little hope for South Africa. Throughout the discussion, the class was extremely quiet. It seemed like I was making some inroads into the class and I felt confident that I would be observing some changes in the class.

I still felt strongly that learners should be allowed to choose their own groups. I instructed the learners to divide themselves into groups of four, reminding them about what I had said about choosing group members. I changed the size of the group from six to four, because I believe that smaller groups work much better.

Learners started going into their different groups. They again divided themselves into groups of colour. At least there were now mixed gender groups. At the same time while this was taking place, I observed what I was hoping would take place. Fairuz and Carlo, who are coloured, decided to break from their usual group and join Simangale and Zukile, who were Xhosa speaking. Seeing this take place gave me hope that my research project could succeed and that it was do-able. I decided to spend some time observing this group. They seemed to be getting on well and they were actively discussing the material in front of them. All four members had strong personalities and were very vocal in the classroom. A question that came to mind was whether that was a determining factor for them breaking away from their respective groups. Were they confident enough to make that change? Were the others not ready to make that change? I believe that it could partly be the reason, because many of my Xhosa-speaking learners have difficulty in communicating in English.

Allowing learners to choose their own groups has its merits and it does instill in learners that sense of being part of the decision making process in the classroom, but I have come to realise that if I wanted my project to achieve its aim of getting the two racial groups interacting and working together, I needed to change the way groups were formed.

42

Giroux (1988) says that teachers must take active responsibility about what they teach, how they teach and what the larger goals are for which they are striving. In a similar way, I needed to become actively involved in getting my learners interacting. This much needed interracial interaction would not take place on its own. I could not allow this division to continue. I needed to take responsibility for my own classroom environment. My belief in a unified, non-racial South Africa did not allow me to accept what was taking place in my classroom. My convictions urged me to take that responsibility Giroux speaks about.

Cycle 2
(2001)

The start of the new school year brought me into contact with a new set of grade seven learners. I was responsible for teaching Mathematics and Natural Sciences to four grade seven classes. I decided to make use of the Grade 7A class of 2001. They had the most coloured learners out of all the grade seven classes. The Grade 7A class consisted of forty learners. There were twenty-six females and fourteen males. Fourteen of the learners were coloured and twenty-six learners were Xhosa-speaking. Their ages ranged from twelve to sixteen.

The first quarter is an exciting and difficult period in any school year. Getting to know one another is never easy. Your learners of the previous year are still fresh in your memory. It is a time when getting to know each other is of the utmost importance, because it sets the tone for the rest of the year. Gaining their trust is also important. I knew that in order for my research project to succeed or at least to be completed, it would depend heavily on my relationship and interaction with my learners. I needed their support in order to do the project. This I did by getting them talking about themselves, what their expectations for their grade seven year was, their reasons for being in school

43

and what they think education was for. This was done during the first week of school, a 'getting to know you' session.

During the first week I spoke to them about the importance of being part of a class. I spoke about how a class is made up of different people from different backgrounds, but that they all belonged to the same class. I emphasised the importance that everybody should feel part of the class and that people must not be excluded on the basis of race, gender or religion.

During the first few weeks of the new quarter I also spoke about how groups needed to operate when groupwork is being done in the classroom. I explained how members of a group must cooperate with one another in order for the group to succeed and complete a given task. I spoke about the importance of working together. I paid special attention to reminding learners about the unique and exciting situation that existed at the school, where previously disadvantaged communities were living side-by-side. I pointed out how lucky they were to have the opportunity to interact with each other, not only at home but also in the classroom. I talked about what happened in the past, where these two racial groups were forced to live apart because of apartheid and how this separation impacted on the relationship and interaction between these two communities. I felt that I needed to talk about that in order for my learners to get a sense of where South Africa comes from and also to show them the importance of interacting and working together in order for South Africa to become a unified nation. Although my learners experienced racism and discrimination on a daily basis, they were not from the generation that experienced apartheid South Africa and therefore I had to inform them of the situation in our country not too long ago. I felt that they needed to know why it was so important for them to interact and cooperate with one another.

Session III

(06 February 2001)

Planning

We were a few weeks into the new school year when I started with the third session. I did not have my class long enough to know if cooperative groupwork would work and what their reaction would be towards it. It would be true to say that I did not expect much. We were still getting to know each other. Knowing your class, I believe is an important element in teaching. Through my teaching experience, I have seen the importance of trust between learners and teachers. If learners trust and feel comfortable with their teachers, they tend to be cooperative and willing to try new things.

A problem that confronted me during this period was the number of coloured learners in grade seven. Compared to the previous year the school's coloured learner population had dropped. This was a problem for me because it meant that I would only be able to have one or two coloured learners in a group and that there might be a few groups that would only consist of Xhosa speaking learners. I decided that there was nothing I could do about it. I had to work with what I had.

I decided to move away from my original strategy of allowing learners to choose their own groups. At this stage, I felt that there needed to be some intervention from my side in order to get them interacting and working together. I divided the class into groups of four. Where possible the groups were racially mixed. This was not possible in all the groups, because of the number of coloured learners.

Each learner received two planets that they had to study and become familiar with. They then had to tell the other members in their group about their particular planet. The group then had to take all the information of the different planets and display it on a chart. Each learner in the group had a task to accomplish and all members of the group depended on the other in order to complete the final product, the chart. Learners would be interdependent on each other. They could not complete the chart if everyone in the group

45

did not participate. This element of cooperative learning distinguishes it from ordinary groupwork that runs the risk of one person completing the assigned task. By ensuring that everyone has a specific task to do, you create the environment that the group needs everyone.

My Observation

My first observation was that some of the learners did not seem busy. They were looking around at other groups, trying to see what they were busy doing. Some group members were not even interacting with their group. I decided to intervene and I emphasised the importance of working together in order to accomplish the task. I encouraged them to start engaging with the work in front of them.

My first positive observation came from Group eight. They seemed to be working well together. Group eight was made up of two coloured and two Xhosa-speaking girls. They were talking to each other about their respective planets. They were working together in order to complete the chart. The four learners in this group spoke English.

Group eleven, an all boy group, also seemed to be working well together, although confrontation and conflict seemed to be popular in this group. They argued about who was going to write and present the chart to the class. I did not want to intervene because I felt that conflict is also a form of interaction and they seemed by the end of the period to have come to some agreement.

An important observation that I made during this session was what I term as the '*isolation factor*'. In some groups there was only one coloured learner and I observed that the coloured learner seemed to be isolated in the group. Although they worked together on the task, they did not seem part of the group.

The lesson could not be completed because we ran out of time and the presentation of the charts could not be done.

46

My Reflection

What came out of this session was that effective planning needed to be done. I had planned my lesson, but I felt that I could have planned better, especially the time issue.

It also became evident that learners needed to be made aware of what was expected of them. They needed to be told what they had to do. Learners also needed to be constantly encouraged to work together.

After this session, I decided to speak to one of the other grade seven teachers. I wanted to bounce off some ideas and strategies and I wanted to find out how she dealt with groupwork in her classes. I wanted her to share her experiences. I believe that it is good for teachers to talk to other teachers about their work. It creates that sense of relief that you are not the only one struggling out there in the classroom. I spoke to her about what I had been doing in the classroom and wanted to know if she had any advice or suggestions to give me. I told her about the problem I had where there was only one coloured learner in a group and that through my observation I have discovered that these learners seem to be isolated. She said that in the English class, she always made sure that there was more than one coloured or Xhosa learner in a group. This was done so that there would always be someone for him or her to talk to. The idea sounded good to me and it would rule out the notion of standing alone in an environment where language can become a barrier.

Planning had to be done properly for session IV. I have come to realise that my previous planning had been done in haste. I did not want to be caught in that trap again. There is always the tendency to forget certain things when planning is done in haste. Through this action research project, I have come to realise that planning is important when doing cooperative groupwork in the classroom. So many times we as teachers do groupwork just because it is a vehicle to get our learners completing their workload. Planning and preparation is of vital importance because it helps you to be prepared and most of all, it gives you the confidence to go into the classroom. Planning is also important in structuring your lesson to achieve its desired goals. My goal was to get my learners

47

interacting with one another and participating in cooperative learning groups. Being clear of my goals and structuring them into my lesson was important for achieving them.

Session IV

"Solar System Model"

(20 February 2001)

Planning

A few days before the lesson, I sat down to do my preparation and planning. My previous session dictated that I needed to be properly prepared. I needed to know what I was going to do, how I was going to do it, why I was doing it and what I needed for the lesson.

I wanted my learners to create a model of the Solar System, and it was important that they needed to work together when creating this model. This activity required certain materials. The groups needed to have coloured chalk, soft black cardboard, white cardboard, scissors and glue. A week before the lesson, I enquired at school whether these materials were in stock and the amounts that the school had. Lucky for me there was enough in the storeroom.

I also sat down and thought about what the composition of the groups should be like. There had to be four learners in a group. The learners were already divided into groups of four. I was aware that some groups were not racially mixed because of the limited number of coloured learners in the class.

In order for the activity to be successful, group members had to work together, they had to be interdependent on each other. I therefore decided on giving group members tasks to do in order that everyone would be busy in the group.

1) 2 members cut out planets
2) 1 member does the writing
3) 1 member colours in the planets

48

4) all the members involved in the pasting and the alignment of planets on the black cardboard

These tasks would be put on the blackboard so that everyone in the class could see what was expected of them. I did not want to tell them who had to do what. I wanted the groups to decide on who was going to do the cutting, colouring and writing. This I believed would give them the opportunity to interact and talk to one another.

The Lesson

I was confident and prepared when I walked into the classroom. I had all the materials that I needed and I knew what I wanted. I introduced the lesson to the class, explaining to them what they had to do. I spent some time talking about the importance of working together and cooperating with one another. I then focussed my attention on the tasks of the group members. I stressed the importance of each member doing his or her part in order to complete the solar system model and that their success would be judged on how well they worked together and the completed solar system model. After explaining to them my expectations and their tasks, they were told to begin.

My Observation

The first group that I observed was group three. They were an all boy group, which consisted of three Xhosa boys and one coloured boy. They seemed to be working well together. They were interacting and talking to each other. They were speaking in English. The members of this group seemed to be comfortable with each other and interaction to them seemed like a natural process.

Group six was another mixed group, two coloured girls and two Xhosa girls. The Xhosa learners in this group were very quiet. The coloured learners were taking the lead and they were the ones allocating the tasks that each one should be doing. I felt that I needed to say something, but decided against getting involved. This sort of intervention is a difficult issue. I have spoken about the roles of practitioner and researcher earlier on in this chapter.

49

Group nine consisted of three coloured learners and one Xhosa learner. This was an all girl group. This group worked well together and they were not shy or afraid to ask questions about the task. This was one of the few groups where one could see and hear the discussion taking place.

Group two was a group that I was personally interested in. Although this was an all Xhosa girl group, I wanted to observe them because two of the girls in this group had great difficulty in understanding and communicating in English. They were from the Eastern Cape, a predominantly Xhosa speaking area, and this was their first year in an English medium school. I decided to place Akhona, who was fluent in English and Xhosa, in the group in order to help them with understanding the task. I observed that Akhona had indeed taken the lead and she explained to them what had to be done in the task.

Group four was also an all Xhosa girl group and this group worked very well together. An interesting feature of this group was that they were discussing the work in Xhosa, but they presented it in English.

I also had an all coloured group. I decided on having this group because I wanted to see how they would interact and do the task. This group consisted of four boys. They worked well together. Each person was busy with his particular task. The members in this group spoke Afrikaans.

Group seven was the last group that I observed. They were an all Xhosa boy group. Their discussions were also conducted in Xhosa. An interesting feature about this group was the innovative ways they drew the planets in the absence of a compass. They looked all around the class for circular shapes of different sizes. There was a little bit of conflict in this group about who should do what, but they sorted themselves out and I decided not to intervene.

50

My Reflection

My preparation prepared me for the lesson. I was confident that my planning was thoroughly done. This I believe is important when teaching. Learners can pick up if a teacher does not know what he or she is doing and this influences your relationship with your learners. The issue of trust I believe is important in any teaching situation. Learners work better with you in a trusting and relaxed environment.

Something that I was not happy about after the lesson was the fact that there were so few mixed groups, because of the number of coloured learners in the class. This was something beyond my control. I did observe that the groups that were made up only of Xhosa learners and the single coloured group seemed more comfortable in their interaction. The mixed groups were working together, but they did not seem comfortable and relaxed in their interaction.

Session V

"Mind Mapping Earth"
(01 March 2001)

Planning

In session V, I decided to change the size of the groups. I wanted to see what would happen if learners were paired up with each other. I decided to have only two learners in a group. The intention was to see if interaction would take place if there were only two members in a group. I believed that there needs to be interaction in such a group, because of the mere size of the group. You have nobody else to talk to but your partner.

I started my planning a few days before the actual lesson took place. I was starting on a new unit in the 'Earth and beyond' theme. The unit was all about earth and its place in the solar system. I wanted to find out from my learners what they knew about their planet. I therefore decided that the best way to do that would be to allow my learners to create a mind map of the earth. This mind mapping entails jotting down important concepts and information about earth. Learners were going to be divided into pairs,

51

preferably a coloured and a Xhosa speaking learner. Each learner would complete their own, individual mind map of earth and then they would discuss their mind maps with their partner. After discussing their mind maps, they would draw up another mind map where their combined information about earth would be written on. They would be allowed to make use of textbooks, atlases and other resources. At the end of the activity the learners would present their combined mind map to the class.

The Lesson

Walking into the class, I must admit that I was not sure whether I was doing the correct thing by changing the group size. I divided the learners into pairs. I explained to the class what was expected of them and I again stressed the importance of working together. I spent a few minutes explaining to the class what a mind map was.

My Observation

There were twenty groups. I discovered that I would not be able to observe all of them, so I decided to observe those groups that were racially mixed. The research was about interracial interaction and these were the groups that directly impacted on the research.

Group two consisted of a Xhosa girl and a coloured girl. They were working well together. They were discussing each other's mind maps. These two girls were also friendly outside the classroom and this is probably the reason why they were working so well together.

Group eight was also an all girl group, a Xhosa and coloured girl. The coloured girl was doing all the talking during the discussion session of the activity. The Xhosa girl was not communicating with the coloured girl.

In group sixteen, there seemed to be a problem. The Xhosa speaking girl did not understand what she had to do. This lead to the coloured girl becoming frustrated and she wanted me to intervene. I decided to speak to the Xhosa girl and explained to her what

52

mind mapping was and what she had to do. After explaining, the two of them started working on the combined mind map.

Group eighteen did not work together. Each one was doing their own mind map, without any discussions taking place.

An argument broke out in group nine about whose mind map was correct.

By the time the period was over more groups started asking me to check their individual mind maps. I also observed that very few discussions were taking place between the pairs about their individual mind maps. When the period ended only a few combined maps were completed.

My Reflection

The end of the period came as a relief. I felt that the lesson and the activity did not work well. The learners were expected to discuss their mind maps with each other and in most cases this did not occur. Maybe I was wrong in dividing the learners into pairs?

Session VI

"Knowing your Rights"

(19 March 2001)

The previous session gave me the much-needed push to get this cooperative groupwork and observation right. It was nearing the end of the quarter and we were coming close to the quarterly assessment week. This meant that the formal timetable would soon end and formal classes would be suspended. I still needed at least one session for the quarter. Human Rights Day (21 March) was coming up and I decided to make use of my Natural Science periods to do a lesson about Human Rights. I felt that this type of lesson would be a good one because many of my learners were not aware of their rights. They needed to be empowered and what better place to start empowerment than in the classroom. I also wanted to do something different in the classroom besides the normal schoolwork. Sometimes kids get tired of just doing schoolwork and I wanted to get away from the

53

normal routine. I wanted my learners to feel free to express themselves without the constraints of schoolwork and the idea of '*I should learn this work*' hanging over them. Human Rights Day gave me that opportunity to do something different.

Planning

I wanted my learners to feel free to discuss their understanding of human rights. I wanted them to tell me what they knew about human rights, specifically their rights. I therefore knew that I needed to prepare a lesson that would generate this freedom to talk openly and freely.

At my previous school, I did a module on Children's Rights. This module was done over a four-week period. I did not have four weeks to do the entire module, so I decided to make use of a section of the module that would get my learners talking about their rights.

The learners were divided into groups of four. I decided to change the groups. I decided to spread the coloured learners more evenly in the class. This would also allow me to observe more mixed groups.

The activities that were in the groups were structured in such a way that everyone in the group would be actively involved in the lesson and the activities. Each member of the group received a worksheet that had three circles on it. A copy of the worksheet can be found in Appendix C. The circles were labelled A, B and C. Each group also received an extra worksheet. This worksheet belonged to the whole group. Each group member first completed his or her individual worksheet. Circle A on the worksheet represented the '*SELF*' and in this circle, learners had to write down those things that happen to them that they don't like. Circle B represented the '*SCHOOL*' and in this circle, learners had to write down the things that happen in school that they don't like. The final circle C was all about the '*COMMUNITY*'. Here learners were encouraged to write down things that happen to children in their community that are wrong. Jotting down their individual comments and responses in the circles would be the first activity of the lesson.

54

The second part of the groupwork involved the group members sharing their individual worksheets with the rest of the group. This discussion then generated the combined comments and responses of the group and these comments and responses were written on the extra worksheet that each group received.

The final part of the lesson was planned as the report back session, where groups spoke about their discussions. I decided not to have the usual report backs, where one member of the group comes up to talk about what his or her group discussed. I have found out that it's normally the same person coming up and some learners have difficulty in speaking in front of the class. I decided that anyone in the group would be free to speak from the group and no person would be coming to the front. A larger version of the worksheet would be placed on the board, where I would jot down the comments and responses of the different groups.

This activity would require more than one period. I was in luck that I had a double science period and a mathematics period.

The Lesson

When I told my learners that we were not going to do Natural Science and that they did not need their notebooks they looked surprised. My learners always complained that I never gave them a free period and this probably surprised them. I explained to them what was going to take place and why we were diverting from the normal lesson. I spoke about 21 March, and its place in South African history. I did not want to say too much about human rights because I wanted my learners to tell me about their understanding of rights. I divided my learners into groups of four. The groups were racially mixed wherever possible. I also tried to ensure that where possible there were two learners of the same racial group in a cooperative learning group.

My Observation

The members of group one were working well together. This was an all girl group, two coloured and two Xhosa-speaking girls. From a general observation this group seemed to

be operating well. Members were busy with their individual worksheets. I decided to take a closer look, because they seemed to be doing all the right things. Being in need of data, this seemed like the perfect opportunity to gather some valuable data. During this closer observation, I discovered that the two coloured learners were the ones taking charge of the group. During the discussion session of the groupwork, they were the ones doing all the talking. The Xhosa learners only spoke when they were asked for their ideas and opinions. It looked like they were not freely communicating in the group. I wanted them to interact and communicate freely and cooperate with one another. Both the coloured learners had strong personalities. They were assertive and knowledgeable, and together they could be an intimidating force, especially to Xhosa-speaking learners who struggled with English. Observing what was taking place made me realise that I needed to be more careful when placing learners in groups. I should have separated them.

While I was observing group one, an argument broke out in group three. Group three consisted of two Xhosa speaking learners, a girl and a boy and two coloured boys. The argument was between Victor, who was Xhosa speaking and Nadeem, who was coloured. The argument was about who was going to do the writing on the extra worksheet the groups received. My observation concluded that they both wanted to be in control of the group. I decided to intervene. I spoke to the group about the importance of working together and that conflict between members would not allow the task to be completed and that this would not be in the best interest of the group. Tensions in the group started to cool down and they began working together. They decided that Phumla should do the writing. I do believe that the conflict that occurred in the group was necessary in order for the group to work together.

Group seven was a group that I had to observe closely. The Xhosa speaking learners in this group had great difficulty in understanding and expressing themselves in English. Because of this situation, a space in the group was created where the two coloured boys took complete control of the group. The Xhosa speaking group members completed their worksheets but did not take part in the discussions. They sat back and observed the whole process. I stepped in and spoke to them about the importance of working together. After

56

speaking to them, I stepped back to observe what was going to happen, but nothing changed. The Xhosa speaking members of group seven remained silent. They did not take part in the discussions. What was taking place in group seven again brought home to me the importance of placing learners in appropriate groups.

Group eight was a lively and talkative group. The group consisted of three Xhosa speaking learners and one coloured girl. Their discussions were vibrant and lively. It was so lively that I had to quiet them down a few times. Liezel, the coloured girl and Nolitha, who was Xhosa speaking were good friends. Liezel also had a good relationship with the other group members. I believe that it is because of this relationship that existed between the members of group eight that interaction was not a problem in this group.

Group two, four and six were all Xhosa speaking groups. Interaction was no problem in these groups. Discussions were done in Xhosa and they reported back in English.

My Reflection

The lesson I believe went down well. The kids opened up and spoke freely about their rights and what they understood about the importance of having these rights.

What came out strongly in this session was the importance of placing learners into groups that would generate interaction. Group seven allowed me to observe the difficulty that Xhosa-speaking learners have where English is used as a means of communication. They did not participate in the activity. What I should have done was to place a Xhosa-speaking learner in that group, who would have acted as an interpreter. Observing group seven again brought home the language issue at the school.

This issue of language was also highlighted in group one. Although the Xhosa-speaking learners participated, the two coloured girls steered the group. This was not what I wanted to take place in the groups. I wanted them to interact on an equal basis.

57

I believe that by knowing your learners, you would be able to place them in groups that would promote interaction and participation.

The main issues

Observing my learners was a learning experience. So often we as teachers are so busy with the lessons that we often forget about our learners and what they are doing. Observation not only allowed me observe my learners in action but it also challenged my teaching practice.

Different points came out of this observation. The importance of planning and structuring cooperative learning lessons came out very strongly. Cooperative learning is unlike other groupwork models. The elements of cooperative learning need to be in place when conducting a cooperative learning session. Positive interdependence needs to be structured into the cooperative learning lesson. The groupwork must be structured in such a way that everyone has a task to do. Learners should also be aware that all group members' cooperation is needed if the group was going to be successful.

Another issue that came out strongly was the importance that language plays in interracial interactions. Many of my learners had great difficulty in expressing themselves in English. This I have not only seen through the observation, but also by interacting with them.

A third issue that was highlighted was the role of the teacher in the classroom. This exercise showed me that I needed to take a proactive role in the classroom if I wanted my learners to interact. My learners would not interact on their own and therefore I needed to place them into groups that would allow them to interact and participate in the cooperative learning experience. Placing learners into groups, I believe is an important strategy, to get learners interacting in a diverse classroom.

58

Explaining your expectations and desired goals to learners are also important. Talking to them about how cooperative learning groups need to operate only enhances their understanding of what is expected of them. My learners seemed to work better together when they knew what was expected of them.

These issues will be discussed later in Chapter 6.

Conclusion

Starting the research project seemed to be a simple assignment. Getting learners into groups, giving them an activity and observing what was taking place was what I was expecting to happen. But it was not as simple as I thought. Cooperative groupwork is much more complex than just having groups work on an activity. It was through my observation and implementation of cooperative groupwork that I have come to realise and respect the complexity of this form of learning. It needs to have various elements to ensure that it achieves its aims, in getting learners interacting. These elements are positive interdependence, placement of learners in groups, planning and structuring the lessons, knowing your learners, understanding the theory and philosophy of cooperative learning and most important you need to know why you are doing it. Implementing cooperative learning and observing it in the classroom has allowed me to understand that it is more than just groupwork.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the interviews I had with my learners and how it had a profound influence on my life.

Chapter 5

Talking to my learners

Introduction

A friend once told me, the best way to find out what people think is to talk to them. I never intended to use interviews as a data gathering technique and it was only on request of my supervisor that I embarked on the interviews. I have come to realise that it was a good decision to engage my learners verbally in order for me to find out how they felt about working together. Hopkins (1985) confirms this when he writes that interviews are often very productive sources of information for the participant observer who wants to verify observations he or she has previously made. He says that interviews can provide rich sources of data.

Fontana and Frey (1998) say that interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful ways we can use to try to understand our fellow human beings. Engaging my learners on this level gave me a much clearer understanding of who they were and it also brought home to me the importance and urgency of my intended outcome to get my learners interacting and working together.

What came out of the interviews had a profound effect on me. The interviews brought to the fore the deep-rooted beliefs of racism and racial divisions that have plagued South African life for centuries. It also highlighted the need to work together. It is strange what impact forty-five minutes of talking can do. I walked out of these sessions with twin feelings of sadness and hope. Sadness for the blatant racism that exists within the four walls of our classrooms and a sense of hope that with commitment and communication change can take place.

60

This chapter is divided into three parts. Firstly, I will describe the interview process, secondly introduce the questions and motivate why the questions were asked and the third part deals with the analysis of the data collected.

Description of interview process

The interviews were held over two days. I interviewed my Xhosa learners 13 September 2001 and I interviewed my coloured learners 17 September 2001. Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes.

Twelve learners were involved in the interviews. Choosing the twelve was not an easy thing to do. If I could, I would have interviewed the whole class. I decided to choose twelve learners, who were not shy to talk. I also felt that they would speak freely and be honest in their comments. The first group consisted of six Xhosa–speaking learners and the second group consisted of six coloured learners. I decided that I was not going to interview individual learners, but engage in group interviews. The purpose for using a group interview was exploratory (Fontana & Frey, 1998). I wanted to explore the feelings my learners had about interracial interaction. Fontana and Frey (1998) say that group interviews have the advantage of being inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding and cumulative and elaborative, over and above individual response. Fontana and Frey also echo a fear that I had about group interviews and this was the possibility of the emerging group culture interfering with individual expression. I was afraid that there might be a dominant person within the group, who would steer the discussions. I tried to prevent this by encouraging my learners to be truthful and honest when answering the questions. The learners came from the Grade 7A class used in the research project. The Xhosa-speaking group consisted of two boys and four girls, and the coloured group was made up of three boys and three girls.

I wanted to find out how the learners felt about working together and interacting with one another. In order for me to achieve this, I decided that each group had to be interviewed separately. I wanted my learners to speak freely. This I believed would be the best way to

ensure honesty and spontaneity. Judging by what I got out of the interviews, I believe that it was the right choice to make.

The groups were interviewed during the last period of the school day, which coincided, with my free period. The interviews were done in the Junior Primary section of the school, because I needed no distractions and a place that was quiet. The learners of the Junior Primary dismiss at 12:30, and this was the ideal time and place to do the interviews.

Before each interview, I explained to the learners about the project and why I wanted to interview them. Croll (1986) says that the researcher must be open with his or her learners and that the research should be conducted in good faith. Subjects should be told the truth and they should be asked for consent. A few of my learners wanted to know if other teachers were going to see or hear the interviews. I explained to them that this was for my thesis. I expressed my desire for them to be honest and open during the interview and not hold back on what they were feeling and wanted to say. 'Gaining trust is essential to an interviewer's success, . . .' (Fontana & Frey, 1998). I had a good relationship with my learners, but I was still not sure how they would engage the questions and be totally honest and open. The response to the questions was unbelievable. I believe that my learners opened up and spoke how they truly felt about interracial interaction in the classroom.

The interviews were all conducted in English. The data was captured on tape and I also took notes as the learners talked. The reason for using the tape recorder was for clarification purposes and to be as accurate as possible in analysing my learners' responses. Bell (1999) says that tape recordings can be useful to check the wording of any statement you might quote and to check that your notes are accurate.

62

The interview questions

The focus of all the questions that I asked revolved around the interracial interaction in the classroom. Each group was asked the same seven questions. Here are the seven questions asked.

1. **How do you feel about working together with Xhosa or coloured children in a small group?**

The question was intended to elicit their personal feelings about interracial interaction in the classroom. I believe this question was a good starting point for the interview because it set the tone of the interview.

2. **Do you think it is important for Xhosa-speaking and coloured learners to work together? Why do you say this?**

Through this question I wanted to find out what importance my learners placed on working together in the classroom.

3. **Are there certain people who do not take part in groupwork? What do you think is the reason for this?**

This question was meant to find out my learners' perceived reasons why certain learners do not take part in groupwork and why they do not interact in groups. This question was also formulated as a means to cross check my observation findings.

4. **What can teachers do in getting Xhosa-speaking and coloured learners to work together?**

Again this question was meant to elicit my learners' perceived understanding of the role of the teacher. I wanted them to tell me how they see my role in the class and what they expected from me. I also wanted to use their responses to check them with my understanding of the role of the teacher in a multi-racial classroom.

5. **How would you feel if you were the only coloured or Xhosa-speaking child in an all Xhosa-speaking or coloured group? Why do you say this?**

63

During my observation I came across what I have termed the 'isolation/exclusion factor'. This is when there is only one learner from group X and the rest of the members are from group Y. From my observation I came to notice that the individual learner feels excluded and isolated from the group. Through this question, I wanted to see if my argument has any validity. Its purpose was to triangulate my observation.

6. How do you feel about English being used as a language of instruction in the classroom?

This question aimed to find out if language was an obstacle in interracial interaction. My observation revealed that language was one of the issues that had to be looked at. Again this question serves as a triangulation of my observation.

7. Who do you like working with when you work in groups? Do you like working with your friends in you group? Why? Why not?

Many times learners prefer working with people they know. During my observation this issue came up again. Some learners wanted to be in groups with their friends. Through this question I wanted the learners to talk about who they prefer working with?

Summary of responses

Xhosa – speaking learners' responses	Coloured learners' responses
Question 1	
How do you feel about working together with Xhosa or coloured children in a small group?	
All my Xhosa learners felt happy about working together with coloured learners in small groups.	My coloured learners said that they did not like working with the Xhosa-speaking learners.
Question 2	
Do you think it is important for Xhosa-speaking and coloured learners to work together? Why do you say this?	
My Xhosa-speaking learners said that it	Most of the coloured learners said that it

was important to work together in order for everyone to learn from each other and to understand each other.	was important to work together, because they could learn from each other. Only two of them said that they did not think it was important to work together.

Question 3

Are there certain people who do not take part in groupwork? What do you think is the reason for this?

They felt that the reason why many of the learners did not interact and participate in the group was because of the language and that coloured learners perceived Xhosa-speaking learners as being different.	The coloured learners viewed the Xhosa-speaking learners as being the problem. They also saw language as a problem when groupwork was being done.

Question 4

What can teachers do in getting Xhosa-speaking and coloured learners to work together?

My Xhosa-speaking learners wanted teachers to mix the learners in the class. They saw a definite role for the teacher.	Three out of the six said that there was nothing the teacher could do to get the class working together.

Question 5

How would you feel if you were the only coloured or Xhosa-speaking child in an all Xhosa-speaking or coloured group? Why do you say this?

They felt that they would not be happy in such a group.	My coloured learners said that they would not be happy in such a group.

Question 6

How do you feel about English being used as a language of instruction in the classroom?

English was seen as a means to accommodate everyone in the classroom.	My coloured learners agreed that English should be used because then everyone would be able to understand each other.

Question 7	
Who do you like working with when you work in groups? Do you like working with your friends in groups? Why? Why not?	
Most of my Xhosa-speaking learners agreed that sometimes friends are not the best people to work with.	All the coloured learners agreed that they preferred working with their friends.

A copy of the transcript has been included in the Appendix A.

Analysis of interviews

The following points and issues emerged from the interviews. Although more issues can probably be discussed, I have focussed on those most relevant to my study.

Feelings about working together

While drawing up the questions I did not expect the responses my learners were going to give and as I have said earlier, what they said took me by surprise. This was quite evident in the manner the two groups (Xhosa-speaking and coloured group) confronted and responded to the questions. This was effectively illustrated by the response to the first question. The first question wanted to know how they felt about working together in a small group. The Xhosa-speaking group said that they thought that working together was a good thing because then everyone would learn about one another and understand one another. Thozama said, "It is a good thing because we learn about each other's culture and we learn to understand each other".

Siphelo remarked, "I am happy because we all understand English." It became evident through the interviews that working together and understanding one another was important to my Xhosa-speaking learners. There was a recognition that interracial interaction is of vital importance.

66

The opposite is true when one looks at what the coloured learners had to say regarding working together. The first one to respond to the question was Ghaleed and he said, "I don't want to work with Xhosa children because they are too ignorant." This took me by surprise. To be honest, I did not know what to do. I was not sure whether to stop and say that we were not going to have any racial comments or remarks. I decided to let the interviews continue and said nothing. I wanted my learners to honest and truthful about their feelings.

Abduragman added, "They want to take over, . . ."

All six of my coloured learners said that they did not want to work with Xhosa-speaking learners. Cowie et al (1994) say that children hold negative attitudes about other ethnic groups and that race is an important factor that influences who they work with. This was evident in what my coloured learners were saying. They did not want to work with Xhosa speaking learners on the basis of their ethnicity. Ethnicity was not the only reason for not wanting to work together, language was also mentioned in their responses to the first question. Liezel said, " . . .they only talk Xhosa and we don't understand what they are saying." The issue of language will be discussed later in this analysis.

Listening to my coloured learners respond to the first question and not responding to their responses cost much self-control. This brought home the complexity of being both the practitioner and researcher. It was difficult sitting there and listening to what was being said without offering an opinion. I had to remind myself that I wanted my learners to speak freely and to be honest. This was what they were saying and I had to respect it, even though I was repelled by what they were saying. Being their teacher, I could not accept what they were saying. The researcher in me was captivated, because this was important and valuable data I was collecting.

<u>*The role of the teacher*</u>

The difference in responses was again evident in how the fourth question was approached by the two groups. The fourth question wanted to know what they thought teachers could do to get Xhosa-speaking and coloured learners working together. All the Xhosa-speaking learners said that teachers needed to mix the learners in the class. They went further and said that the reason for this mixing was so those learners could learn to understand one another. Siphelo was direct when he said, "To make coloured children sit next to Xhosa learners."

Thozama said, "Mixing the groups, so that we can learn from each other."

Akhona was more practical and answered, "Mix the learners so that we can learn one another's language. . . " For me that was an important and profound comment, because through my observation and my teaching experience at Delft South Primary, language stands out as one of the biggest obstacles for interracial interaction. What got my attention was the maturity of my Xhosa-speaking learners in identifying the need to work together and the importance of understanding and learning from each other. The learner that captured the essence of what cooperative learning is all about and the intention of this project was Phumla, who said, "Teachers must allow children to teach each other." Johnson and Johnson (online) argue that learners in cooperative learning groups need to help and assist each other. What Phumla was saying was what I wanted to achieve.

The coloured group's response to the fourth question was the exact opposite to that of the Xhosa-speaking group. Three of the learners said that nothing could be done by teachers in getting Xhosa-speaking and coloured learners working together. Ghaleed's answer was "Nothing, Sir. They can put the children together but the children still won't work."

Abduragman said, "Nothing, sir, because they won't sit by us."

Liezel also brought up the issue of language in response to the fourth question. She said, "The teachers must explain in English."

Nuraan made a very positive remark, saying that teachers needed to treat everyone equally. Cowie et al (1994) cites a research done by Wright in 1992 in Britain, where she argues that teachers' attitudes towards 'black' children have a strong influence on peer relationships. This was what Nuraan was talking about and that teachers are sometimes at fault in treating learners differently.

The differences in the two groups I believe is an important issue that came out of the interviews. It shows the complexity in getting them interacting. It also shows the need to get them working together in order to bridge that interracial gap that exists in the classroom.

Language

An issue that both groups brought up throughout the interview was the issue of language. The language issue came through as one of the main factors that has the ability to divide the classroom and it also came through as a factor that can unite the learners into a community of learners.

a. _Language as an obstacle to interracial interaction_

Three of the Xhosa-speaking learners had a problem with English being used. Thozama noted that she thought that the reason why some learners don't take part in groupwork was because they could not speak English. Amanda added, "Some don't know English." This I picked up through my observation and it was very evident in this particular grade seven class. There were a few learners who had been transferred from the Eastern Cape, where they attended a Xhosa medium school. These learners had great difficulty in communicating and expressing themselves in English. They very seldom took part in groupwork. Language to them was an obstacle, preventing them from interacting.

69

Five out of the six coloured learners saw language as a problem and an obstacle for interaction. The problem they had was not with English being used but Xhosa being used by the Xhosa learners. These learners were very vocal in their opposition against Xhosa being used and spoken in the classroom. This opposition to Xhosa came through strongly in all the questions being asked to the coloured group.

Liezel said, "I don't like to work with them because they only talk Xhosa and we don't understand what they are saying."

Abduragman said, "They just want to speak their language . . . "

What became evident through these interviews was that the coloured learners had a big problem with Xhosa being spoken in the classroom and also being used in the groups. Ghaleed said, " . . . they can use English as a language, but while they sit next to each other, they will still talk Xhosa."

The language issue is a contested issue in our classrooms and this was again brought to the fore through the interviews. The way the two groups responded to the issue was very interesting. The coloured group has a clear and definite opposition to Xhosa being used in the classroom and in the groups. They were vocally opposed to it being used. The Xhosa group on the other hand recognised the difficulty that certain learners have with English. Amanda said, " . . . my English is not that good." She recognised that English was not her first language and that it was a problem when it came to groupwork and interracial interaction. The fact that she recognised the difficulty gave me a sense of hope. It is often said that in order to progress, one should understand oneself.

b. English as a means to interracial interaction

When asked the question, "How do you feel about English being used as a language of instruction in the classroom?" both groups agreed that English should be used as the medium of instruction.

Learners in the Xhosa-speaking group agreed that in order for everyone to understand each other, English must be used as the medium of instruction. Siphelo said, " . . . everyone can hear what you are saying and you can understand."

Phumla replied, " . . . we can understand each other."

Thozama said, "All can speak one language and all can understand."

What was very evident from the responses of the Xhosa-speaking group was the need to understand each other in the group and in the classroom. They perceived that English, as the medium of instruction was the means to achieve this understanding. English was seen as a language that was accessible to both groups.

Three out of the six coloured learners made similar comments about understanding each other. They too viewed English as a means to facilitate and encourage understanding.

Johannes said, "I feel good because if they speak English, we all speak English. We will understand each other." Nuraan and Liezel echoed Johannes's sentiment that everyone would be able to understand each other.

Nuzreen viewed English on a more personal level and she expressed her feelings when she said, "I will feel good, because then they can't gossip about the person." The 'they' is referring to Xhosa-speaking learners. This is a trend that I have picked up in the coloured group, the issue of 'us and them'. It is an issue that comes through very strongly.

Language was an important issue that appeared and came through strongly in both groups. It was viewed as an obstacle for interracial interaction, but it was also seen as having the ability to be used as a means to allow the two groups to interact and communicate with each other and bring about an understanding. Like Phumla said, "We need to work together so that we can understand each other and then we can discuss and speak one language."

71

Being alone in the group

A question that both groups had similar responses to was question five. The question was all about being alone in an all coloured or Xhosa-speaking group. They were adamant that they would feel alone and isolated. Amanda, who was Xhosa-speaking says, "I will feel alone and I won't have someone to talk to." This isolation factor or feeling alone was also picked up during the observation process, where I observed that learners who were alone in an all Xhosa or coloured group, tended to be isolated and excluded from the group and made very little contribution in the group. Amanda also said, "I would feel shy because my English is not that good." Again the language issue was brought into play. Language here was being seen as an exclusion factor that separated her from the group. Gillborn (1990) remarks that studies have shown that language can be a powerful means of exclusion. I agree with what he says because through my observation and teaching I have seen that language is one of the overriding factors that hampers and prevents inter-racial interaction in my classroom. Thozama said, "I would not be happy because they will not speak English but Afrikaans and you will feel shy to say anything." English for Thozama was not the problem, but the fact that when she was alone in an all coloured group, they would communicate in Afrikaans and that would exclude her from the group. Phumla echoed the same sentiments as Thozama when she said, "They would refuse to speak English and gossip about you." The point that Thozama, Phumla, Amanda and all the other learners were trying to make was that they would felt less left out or excluded if they had other Xhosa-speaking learners in the group to talk to.

Similar sentiments and feelings were also expressed in the coloured group. They too were not happy about being part of a group that consisted mainly of Xhosa-speaking learners. Liezel expressed the feelings of the group best when she said, "I won't feel right, sir, because they talk Xhosa and I don't understand their language and I feel like nothing. I am not seen."

Nuraan said, "... they will not listen to me."

72

Abduragman said, " . . . they won't talk with me."

Ghaleed said, " . . . they will just make like I don't exist."

The element of exclusion was very strongly expressed in the coloured group. Again the issue of 'us and them' came to the fore.

The responses to this question highlights and supports the observation data that single Xhosa-speaking or coloured learners in groups feel alone and excluded from the rest of the group and that the overriding factor contributing to this exclusion is language.

Working with friends

Through my teaching experience I have observed that when it comes to groupwork, learners tend to want to work with their friends. It was with this in mind that I wanted to find out if this observation was true. Like most of the questions, the responses of the two groups differed completely.

The Xhosa-speaking group caused me to rethink my assumption that learners like working with friends. Siphelo said, "No. Friends do not want to work and they just want to talk . . ."

Amanda commented, "Friends won't talk about schoolwork." When asked who she likes to work with in the class, Akhona said, "I like to work with everyone in the class."

What came out of the Xhosa-speaking group was that they saw that friends were not always the best people to work with and to have in your groups because not much work would be done. But Amanda also said that it was sometimes good to work with friends because they were the ones that understood you and you would not be shy speaking to them.

73

The response to the seventh question by the coloured group differed from that of the Xhosa-speaking group. Central to their responses was that they preferred working with their friends. Friends to them meant coloured. Nazreen said that she liked working with her friends because they, "understand each other's language".

Johannes in his response was more blatant, " . . . because if you fight with one of the Xhosa speakers, then your friend will come help you."

What became crystal clear was that the coloured learners viewed friends and friendship in terms of race. This is evident in how they express who they prefer working with. Cowie et al (1994) support this when they argue that friends tend to come from the same ethnic group and that own-group friendships are strongly established at an early stage in multi-ethnic primary schools.

Conclusion

The interview session that I have had with the two groups gave me the much-needed insight into the interracial relationships that existed within my classroom. Three issues have surfaced that will be discussed in the following chapter; language, the role of the teacher and the exclusion/isolation factor. Although there are more issues, I have decided to focus on the three.

What is more striking and interesting is the difference in responses to the questions, the antagonistic feeling towards Xhosa-speaking learners by coloured learners and the 'lets work together, so that we can understand each other' proposition by Xhosa-speaking learners. This on its own is a stimulating and an explorative debate and should be considered for future research.

74

Chapter 6

The lessons that I have learnt

Introduction

Thinking about and planning this research project could not prepare me for the actual project itself. Much idealism went into this project in the beginning. The expectation of quick fixes permeated my thoughts. Teachers are always looking for new and improved classroom strategies to maximise their learners' potential and output, and to lighten their own teaching load. I was no different. I also envisioned cooperative learning as a magical potion that would transform my classroom into a Mecca of interracial harmony and interaction. Doing the actual project was something completely different. I have come to realise that quick fixes in education very seldom occur. I however still believe that idealism is an important starting point in education. Freire (1987) says that transformation has to be accomplished by those who dream about the reinvention of society. But he cautions us that we should not approach liberation education in an idealistic fashion, expecting that things will change overnight.

This final chapter serves the purpose of concluding this project. In this chapter I will be discussing the outcome of this research project and also the lessons I have learnt. I will be discussing how this project has influenced and challenged my understanding of education and interracial interaction. In the final part of this chapter, I would like to put forward some recommendations or ideas for future interracial interaction studies and projects.

Summarising the data

Getting my learners interacting was central to this research project. Cooperative learning was the strategy I used to help me in allowing and encouraging interracial interaction. This strategy that encourages learners to cooperate on a joint task has been the focal point

75

of this project. Throughout the project different issues came to the fore that would strengthen and aid this strategy of learning.

The empirical research (observation and interviews) highlighted various known factors I was aware of, and it also exposed new factors to me. The issues of language, effective planning and the role of the teacher were issues I was familiar with. The placement of learners and the 'isolation factor' were new points that were brought to the fore because of the research.

The observations and interviews allowed me to gain valuable information about my learners, my school and my own teaching practice.

Throughout the different observation sessions I have come to understand the importance of planning and structuring cooperative learning lessons. I had to sit down and think about what I was going to do and how I was going to achieve my objectives. Communicating my expectations and purpose is another important lesson that I have learnt through this study. Before any cooperative session I had to talk to my learners, explaining to them what we were going to do and why we were doing it. The third lesson that I have learnt is that teachers need to take a proactive role in getting learners interacting. This should be done through placing learners into groups. My learners on their own would not mix and therefore I had to place them into cooperative learning groups. Language is another important issue that came out of the research. So often we as teachers assume that our learners understand what we are saying and that they are able to communicate with others. Language is a serious problem at my school and this issue was highlighted not only through the observation, but also through the interviews. These points I have highlighted will be discussed in more detail

Planning and structuring of cooperative lessons and classes

Effective planning and structuring of lessons has come through very strongly in this research project. The cooperative sessions that I had have shown me how important planning and structuring of lessons are. In order for the lesson of the Solar System to have worked, I needed to sit down and think about how my learners were going to work in their cooperative groups. I needed to think about the size of the groups, who was going to be placed where and who was going to do what. I needed to structure the groupwork in such a way that it not only promoted the cooperative element of positive interdependence, but also assured individual accountability. My experience has taught me that in groups, certain individuals will not pull their weight. It has occurred many times that learners would sit back and allow others in the group to do all the work. Structuring the element of positive interdependence into the cooperative learning lesson or task, you ensure that everyone in the group is aware that they all are responsible not only for their own learning, but also for that of everyone else in their group (Lang et al, 1995). An example of this was the making of the Solar System model, where each group member had a specific task and in order for the model to be completed, each one had to do his or her share. Lang et al (1995) say that you promote individual accountability when you make each group member responsible to the group for completing the cooperative learning task. Cooperative learning is unlike any groupwork. You cannot tell learners to go into groups and discuss or work together. These above-mentioned points needed to be in place. I have also noticed that when I had planned and structured my lessons, I was more confident and relaxed. This I have taken to heart and still practice detailed preparation and structuring before I go into a classroom. Before going into a classroom, planning has to be done. I have come to realise and accept the importance of sitting days before the actual lesson, planning and preparing the cooperative learning lesson. It not only fully prepared me for the lesson but it also gave me a sense of confidence. Learners easily pick up on teachers who venture into their classrooms unprepared. Many times when this happens the lesson never seems to achieve its goal. It is therefore important for teachers to display that confidence of being prepared for the lesson. Cooperative learning is a complex educational strategy. It is not something that you can just implement in the

classroom. You need to be prepared and know what you intend to do and how you are going to do it. I have found it easier to plan my cooperative lessons days or sometimes weeks in advance, because it allows me to reassess my planning continuously, trying to find the correct method of implementation and execution.

Another important aspect of proper planning is the importance of having the relevant materials at hand. Having materials that are relevant to cooperative learning and that would enhance this strategy is very important. Cooperative learning is an interactive strategy and therefore the various materials need to be interactive in order to complement cooperative learning. My learners are very much visually stimulated and orientated. They respond to drawings, pictures, diagrams and other visual stimuli. It is important to have material that they could interact with. An example of this would be the Human Rights circles in Appendix C. By being creative with your materials, I believe that you not only stimulate their interest, but also encourage them to interact with it. During the lesson of the Solar System, my learners had to make models of the Solar System. This activity would not have been successful if the appropriate materials were not at hand. I needed to have black cardboard, coloured chalk, white soft cardboard, scissors and glue. These materials complemented the activity. I have also discovered through my teaching experience that learners are happy and enthusiastic when they work with their hands and create. That is a good environment for cooperative learning to take place in.

An informed teacher is a confident teacher. Cooperative learning cannot be done in the classroom if the teacher is not familiar with the philosophy behind cooperative learning. I must admit before the start of this research project, my understanding of cooperative learning was based on my understanding of learners being in groups. It was through my research into cooperative learning that I became familiar with the elements needed for an effective cooperative learning lesson. The importance of structuring positive interdependence and individual accountability into your groupwork only became known to me through reading the philosophy behind cooperative learning. Effective planning and an informed teacher, I believe are essential elements for an effective cooperative lesson.

78

Communicating with learners the expectations and outcomes

How you communicate with your learners is what I believe makes a lesson successful or unsuccessful. Learners need to understand not only what is expected of them, but also why they are doing it. I have discovered through this research project that I needed to communicate with my learners my expectations and also my intentions for introducing cooperative learning in their classroom. I had to explain to them the importance of working together, and especially the importance of interracial interaction and its place in a democratic, non-racial South Africa. I had to speak about the past and how race was used to divide the people of South Africa and how race still separate us from one another today. I had to convey to them my goal of having a classroom where learners work together, interact and cooperate with one another. Freire (1987) says that we need to make clear to learners what our dreams are. He says that we need to convince learners about our dreams but not to conquer them for our own selfish end. Being open and truthful with your learners, I believe is important. They need to be aware of where you are coming from and in which direction you wish to guide them. Communicating your intentions, expectations and outcomes are of vital importance when implementing cooperative learning. I have observed that when I have spoken to my learners about my expectations and explained to them what I intended them to do, they seemed to follow my instructions. This was evident in session two, when I explained to the class that they need to choose group members not on the basis of colour and that they needed to mix with each other. Fairuz and Carlo took that brave step and joined up with Zukile and Simangale. This I believe took place because of what I said in the classroom. Kirk (1997) says that the teacher has an important role to play in a cooperative learning environment. Teachers need to explain the task and goal structure to their learners. A cooperative learning lesson often begins with some direct instruction from the teacher. My learners were new to this form of teaching strategy. They would not have been able to go into groups and cooperate and interact with each other. They needed guidance and support, and therefore it is important to communicate your expectations and purpose to them. Felder and Brent (1996) say that persuading students that groupwork is in their best interest is only the first step. They say that the teacher must also structure group exercise

to promote positive interdependence among the group members. This latches onto the previous point of planning and structuring of lessons.

Putting learners into groups

Another issue that presented itself during the observations and interviews was the issue of being the only Xhosa-speaking or coloured child in an all coloured or Xhosa-speaking group. This resulted in these learners not taking part in the groupwork or any of the group discussions or activities. I have termed this the 'isolation factor', because these learners felt isolated from the rest of the group. With the aid of a fellow teacher, I tried to accommodate these learners in ensuring that there would never be any single Xhosa-speaking or coloured learner in a cooperative learning group. This would allow learners to always have someone to talk to. This scenario would obviously not be necessary when learners are more comfortable with one another.

I have discovered through this project that placement of learners is of vital importance. Johnson and Johnson (1987) say that in order to build constructive relationships between different groups, there need to be heterogeneous cooperative learning groups with a variety of learners within each learning group. I needed to place my learners into their groups in order for cooperative and interracial interaction to take place. By allowing them to form their own groups, you run the risk of having groups based on race or friendship. This I discovered during the first two observation sessions. It is therefore important, I believe, that the teacher needs to assess his or her classroom and reorganise the groups and learners in such a way that it maximises the interracial interaction. Cooperative learning is a strategy designed to get learners talking to one another and working together. By not placing learners into heterogeneous groups, the objective of cooperative learning cannot be achieved.

The importance of being actively involved in getting learners together was reinforced through this research. Allowing learners to work together on their own without assistance and intervention would not have worked. They needed the constant encouragement,

80

intervention and guidance in order for cooperation and interaction to take place. This is sometimes not an easy thing to do, being both researcher and practitioner. Johnson and Johnson (1987) advise teachers to guide learners to a solution that they themselves discover and implement. They add that it is only in the most extreme cases that you may wish to tell learners how to behave more appropriately and skillfully. An important point that they make is that sometimes teachers become too active in solving problems of collaboration that learners do not get a chance to work through it themselves. In order for cooperative learning to fully work and for it to be successful, teachers need to be actively involved in getting learners working together, but they also need to allow their learners the freedom to work through it themselves.

Language

From the start of this research project, language has been an important factor. English is the medium of instruction at the school, even though a few of the learners at the school use English as a first language. For many English is a second or third language. Garcia (1990) says that language is a complex social system that allows children to understand and influence their environment. Language at Delft South Primary has a direct influence on the learners' environment, especially their relationships within the classroom. Through the interviews and observation that I have conducted with my learners, I gained valuable insight into how many of my learners feel. For those who are not fluent or adequate in communicating in English, cooperative group work seemed a daunting task, because of the element of communication. Through this research project, I have seen Xhosa-speaking learners not taking part in any group discussions because of the difficulty in communicating in English. These same learners when put in an all Xhosa-speaking group would discuss and work together in the group. This working together and discussions would be done in Xhosa and presented in English by someone who was fluent and comfortable with English. I believe for some learners, English was an obstacle that prevented interaction within the groups and classroom. But I also believe that it is an obstacle that can be overcome. The first step is to recognise that there are language and cultural differences in our groups and in our classrooms. The placements of learners in

81

their groups are therefore very important. It is important that you, as the teacher know your learners. You need to know their strengths and weaknesses. This I believe will help you in matching learners and placing them in groups that would make it easier to communicate in. A possible solution to this problem would be to place learners who have language difficulties with someone who is fluent and comfortable with English. This person would then act as an interpreter and guide within the group. Again the issue of proper learner placement comes to the fore. We cannot wish away the language issue. We need to recognise it and find ways to maximise interracial interaction and communication in our classrooms. McLaughlin (1992) says that if the teacher is unaware of cultural or language differences their expectations and interactions with their children may be influenced.

Teachers as agents of transformation

This research project was aimed at getting my learners working together, but ended up being more than that. Not only have I grown as a teacher by engaging with cooperative learning as a strategy, but also more important I have come to understand my learners with their own racial perceptions.

Throughout 2001, I observed and spoke to my learners and this gave me insight into their personas and also reinforced the belief that we need to break down those barriers that separate us and start talking and working together. There is a need for transformation in our society. Although we are politically free, these divisions of the past still haunt us. It is reflected in our schools and in our classrooms. Our learners still interact, participate and play according to race. It is therefore the role of the teacher, I believe to be a catalyst of transformation. Modise (1999), wrote that teachers are the central players in building a multilingual, multiracial and multicultural democracy and that schools are one of the primary institutions where the new society is being born.

An important role of the teacher in a democratic South Africa is the role he or she plays in aiding the transformation process in South Africa. I believe we who belong to this

noble profession have an important role to play in trying to create a society where race does not determine your social status and who you want to sit next to you. Giroux (1988) says that we need to view teachers as transformative intellectuals. He continues and says that teachers must take active responsibility for raising serious questions about what they teach, how they teach and what the larger goals are for which they are striving. This I believe is an important role of the teacher. We as members of the teaching fraternity have a moral, social and political duty to address the issues that divide our nation and society. We need to address the issue of race in our classrooms. I agree with Giroux when he says that we need to view our schools as economic, cultural and social sites that are inextricably tied to the issues of power and control. We as teachers need to engage our learners in our classrooms and especially in multi-racial, ethnic and lingual classrooms. We as teachers need to encourage our learners to work together, to interact and cooperate with one another. Teachers have an important and definite role to play in addressing the issues of race and division.

Throughout my teaching career, I have always believed that teachers are agents of empowerment and transformation. Through this research project my belief in that has strengthened. Teachers in a democratic South Africa teach in exciting and challenging times. The future of our nation is cradled in our hands. Meerkotter and Van den Berg (1994) say the teacher should be regarded as one of the most important agents in the process of empowering young people for life. I believe that change does not occur by itself. We need to usher in change. We cannot claim to be a united South Africa, if our classrooms are still divided.

Future research

My research has not delivered a blueprint in getting learners interacting. I have not concluded that everybody is now cooperating and working together. It however brought about new questions and issues.

I have highlighted a number of issues for future research or studies. The role of language in a cooperative learning environment is a vital research topic. This especially needs to look at what strategies can be used in order to help learners who have difficulty in communicating and understanding the medium of instruction in the classroom. Another issue that needs further attention is how racial perceptions influence interaction within a multi-racial, ethnic and lingual classroom. Lots of international research and literature has been written on this topic. I do believe that more local research needs to be done in order for us to gain valuable insight into our own situation. Issues of race in the South African classrooms are so important. Teachers in South Africa need guidance in how to deal with these issues.

During my literature search, I discovered that there was very little South African based literature regarding cooperative learning. Lots of research has been done by people outside of the South African environment and context. This saddens me because of the importance of finding ways of getting our learners from different backgrounds working together. It also shows me a sense of urgency for more teachers to become researchers. Teachers are the best people to research this topic. It is the teacher who battles the demons of apartheid's legacy. We need more contextualised research in this field. I believe that cooperative learning can play a significant role in breaking down those barriers that separate our nation

Conclusion

Differences in our classrooms cannot be wished away. Our learners are the products of a system that has torn apart the South African landscape. Although we have celebrated a number of years of freedom, South Africa today is still a divided country. This division is extremely evident in classrooms around this beautiful country. My divided classroom, can be any classroom across South Africa.

Cooperative learning, I believe, can bring about change in our divided classrooms. Cooperative learning is a strategy that can get learners from different backgrounds, whether it is race or language, working together. I have seen through this research project that change is possible. With proper planning, placement of learners and teacher intervention, we have a chance of bringing together a divided nation. Our children are our future leaders and it is our duty to bring about that much needed change that would allow them to see one another as fellow South Africans. We have a long road ahead of us, and we need teachers and strategies like cooperative learning to aid us in our journey of transformation.

UNIVERSITY *of the*

WESTERN CAPE

Bibliography

Ainscow, M. and Tweddle D. A. 1989. *Encouraging Classroom Success*. London: Fulton Publishers.

Banks, J. 1984. Multiethnic Education in the USA; Practices and Promises. In T. Corner (ed), *Education in Multicultural Societies*. London: Croom Helm: 68 – 95.

Bell, J. 1999. *Doing Your Research Project: A guide for first time researchers in education and social science*. New York: Open University Press.

Brott, C and Easen, P. 1994. *Collaborative Learning in Staffrooms and Classrooms*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Brubacher, J., Reagan, T. and Case, C. 1994. *Becoming a Reflective Educator: How to Build a Culture of Inquiry in the Schools*. California: Corwin Press.

Burnaford, G. 2001. Teachers' Work: Methods for Researching Teaching. In Burnaford, G., Fischer, J. and Hobson, D. (ed), *Teachers Doing Research: The power of action through inquiry*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associate Publishers.

Burnaford, G., Fisher, J. & Hobson, D. 2001. *Teachers Doing Research: The power of action through inquiry*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associate Publishers.

Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. 1986. *Becoming Critical; Education, Knowledge and Action Research*. Lewes: Falmer Press.

Claydon, L., Knight, T. and Rado, M. 1977. *Curriculum and Culture, Schooling in a Pluralist Society*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Christie, P. 1990. *Open Schools; Racially Mixed Catholic Schools in South Africa, 1976 – 1986.* Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Christie, P. 1994. *The Right to Learn: The Struggle for Education in South Africa.* Braamfontein: Ravan Press.

Cohen, L and Manion, L. 1989. *Research Methods in Education.* London: Routledge.

Conod, J. 1997. *A More Cooperative Classroom.* [online] Available http://www.Action Research Reports.com

Cowie, H., Smith, P. Boulton, M. and Laver, R. 1994. *Cooperation in the Multi-Ethnic Classroom.* London: David Fulton Publishers.

Croll, P. 1986. *Systematic Classroom Observation.* London: Falmer Press.

Davidoff, S.1993. *Reflections on Facilitating Action Research.* M.Ed. Thesis. University of the Western Cape.

Evertson, C. and Green, J. 1986. Observation as Inquiry and Method. In Wittrock, M. (ed), *Handbook of Research on Teaching.* New York: McMillan.

Felder, R.M. and Brent, R. 1996. *Navigating the Bumpy Road to Student – Centered Instruction*[online].Available http://www.nesu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/papers.html

Fontana, A. and Frey, J. 1998. Interviewing; The Art of Science. In Denzin, N.E. and Lincoln, Y (ed.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials.* London: Sage Publications: 47 – 75.

Freire, P. and Shor, I. 1987. *A Pedagogy for Liberation; Dialogues on Transforming Education.* New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Garcia, E. 1990. *Bilingualism and the Academic Performance of Mexican-American Children; The Evolving Debate*. ERIC Digest [online]. Available http://askeric.org/

Gillborn, D. 1990. *Race, Ethnicity and Education; Teaching and Learning in Multi-Ethnic Schools*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Giroux, H.A. 1988. *Teachers as Intellectuals; Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*. Massachusetts: Bergin & Garing.

Hopkins, D. 1985. *Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Johnson, D.W. and Johnson, R.T. 1987. *Learning Together and Alone; Cooperative, Competitive and Individualistic Learning*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.

Johnson, D.W. and Johnson, R.T. (date unknown) *Cooperative Learning, Values and Culturally Plural Classrooms*. [online]. Available http://www.clcrc.com/pages/clandd.html

Kincheloe, J.L. and Steinberg, S.R. 1997. *Changing Multiculturalism*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Kirk. T. M. 1997. *The Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning*. Ph.D. Thesis. University of Dublin.

Klein, G. 1993. *Education Towards Race Equality*. Great Britain: Cassell.

Lang, H. R., McBeath, A. and Hébert, J. 1995. *Teaching; Strategies and Methods for Student – Centered Instruction*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Ledlow, S. 1995. *Tips for Climate Setting Cooperative Learning Classrooms* [online]. Available http://www.emc.maricopa.edu/innovation/CCL/climsett.html.

88

Lee, C. 1997. *Cooperative Learning in the Thinking Classroom; Research and Theoretical Perspectives.* [online] Available http://www/geocities.com/Athens/Thebes/1650/coopthk.html.

Lemmer, E. and Squelch, J. 1993. *Multicultural Education; A Teachers Manual.* Pretoria: Sigma Press.

Loughram, J. 1999. *Researching Teaching, Methodologies and Practices for Understanding Pedagogy.* Falmer Press.

Markham, M. 1999. Through the Looking Glass: Reflective Teaching Through a Lacanian Lens. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 29 (1): 55 – 75).

McCormick, J. & Freeman, P. 1988. "If the Mountain Won't Come to McCormick . . ." Improving Pupil's Classroom Performance: a practitioner's case study. *Education Action Research*, 6 (2).

McLaughlin, B. 1992. Myths and Misconceptions about Second Language. ERIC Digest. [online]. Available http://askeric.org/

McNiff, J. 1988. *Action Research; Principles and Practices.* Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Meerkotter, D. and Van den Berg, O. 1994. Technicism, schooling and power; Towards a recontextualization of education. In Da Costa, Y. Julie, C. and Meerkotter, D. (ed.), *Let the Voices be Heard; Process and Practice in Education.* Plumstead: Wyvern Publications: 1 – 12.

Modise, L. 1999. *Multicultural Education. Speak Out,* (19), 19 February: 4 – 5.

National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI). 1992. *Curriculum.* Pretoria: Oxford.

Panitz, T. 1996. *A Definition of Collaborative vs Cooperative Learning*. [online].
Available http://www/lgu.ac.uk/deliberations/collab.leraning/panitz2.html.

Race, P. 2000. *500 Tips on Group Learning*. London: Kogan Page Ltd.
Republic of South Africa. 1996. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. Pretoria.

Shor, I. 1992. *Empowering Education: Critical Thinking for Social Change*. Chicago:
The University of Chicago Press.

Van den Berg, O. 2001. The Three P's in Teacher Research: Reflecting on Action
Research from Personal, Professional and Political Perspectives. In Burnaford, G., Fisher,
J. and Hobson, D. (ed), *Teachers Doing Research: The power of action through inquiry*.
London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associate Publishers.

Wallerstein, N. 1987. Problem – Posing Education: Freire's Method for Transformation.
In Shor, I. (ed.), *Freire for the Classroom*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Wiersema, N. 2000. *How does collaborative learning actually work in a classroom and
how do students react to it*. [online Available]
http://www.lgu.ac.uk/deliberations/collab.leraning/wiersema.html

Wolcott, H.F. 1994. *Transforming Qualitative Data*. London: Sage Publications.

Wragg, E. 1994. *An Introduction to Classroom Observation*. London: Routledge.

Zeichner, K. & Liston, P. 1996. *Reflective Teaching: An Introduction*. New Jersey:
Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Author unknown. *Cooperative Learning; Response to Diversity*. [online] Available
http://www.cde.ca.gov./iasa/coop/rng2.html.

90

Author unknown. *Cooperative Learning Strategies and Children.* [online] Available http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERICDIGEST/ed30603.html.

Appendix

Appendix A

Transcript No. 1

"*Xhosa-speaking Learners*"
13/09/01

1. How do you feel about working together with coloured children in a small group?

Siphelo: I am happy because we all understand English.

Thozama: It is a good thing because we learn about each other's culture and
we learn to understand each other.

Akhona: It is good because we learn from each other.

---

2. Do you think it is important for Xhosa and coloured learners to work together?
Why do you say this?

Siphelo: Yes, we learn to speak English.

Amanda: Yes, it is important. We learn things from them that we don't know. It
shows that apartheid is over.

Phumla: We need to work together so that we can understand each other and
then we can discuss and speak one language.

Sitembele: It is important so that we can understand one another.

Akhona: Learn to know one another's needs.

Thozama: It is important to work together. We can help each other.

---

3. Are their certain people who do not take part in groupwork? What do you think is
the reason for this?

Akhona: There are people who do not take part in groupwork because they feel
that they are different.

Phumla: Coloured children think that we are different and maybe they feel that
they are different and so they don't want to take part in groupwork.

Thozama: Some don't take part because they can't speak the language. Some
coloured children don't want to take part because they think we have

92

disease and that they will get it if they touch us.

Amanda: Some children are shy to work with other people, like Janine. Some don't know English.

Akhona: Some children think black people are poor and don't want to work together.

___

4. What can teachers do in getting Xhosa and coloured learners to work together?

Siphelo: Mixing the groups. To make coloured children sit next to Xhosa children.

Thozama: Mixing the groups so that we can learn from each other. When Liezel was in my group, I was teaching her Xhosa.

Phumla: Teachers must allow children to teach each other.

Akhona: Mix the learners so that we can learn one another's language.

Sitembele: Mix up the language classes.

___

5. How would you feel if you were the only coloured child in an all Xhosa group? Why do you say this?

Siphelo: I would be happy. I would learn to speak Afrikaans and English.

Akhona: I would not feel happy.

Amanda: I would feel shy because my English is not that good.

Thozama: I would not be happy because they will not speak English but Afrikaans and you will feel shy to say anything.

Phumla: They would refuse to speak English and gossip about you.

Amanda: I will feel alone and I won't have someone to talk to.

___

6. How do you feel about English being used as a language of instruction in the classroom?

Siphelo: Good, everyone can hear what you are saying and you can understand.

___

93

Phumla: Good, we can understand each other.

Thozama: All can speak one language and all can understand.

Amanda: We all can cooperate. English is used in all the other places like colleges.

---

7. *Who do you like working with when you work in groups. Do you like working with your friends in your group? Why/Why not?*

Siphelo: No. Friends do not want to work and they just want to talk.

Amanda: No. Friends won't talk about schoolwork.

Akhona: I like to work with everyone in the class.

Thozama: I like working with my group (Liezel, Nadeem, and Nuraan). They help me when I don't understand.

Amanda: Sometimes it is nice working with friends. They are the ones that understand you and you wont be shy speaking with them.

Transcript No. 2

"Coloured Learners"
17/09/01

1. *How do you feel about working together with Xhosa speaking children in a small group?*

Ghaleed: I don't want to work with Xhosa children because they are to ignorant.

Abduragman: They want to take over, sir, and I want to work alone.

Johannes: Sir, I don't like them because if you swear at them, they are going to
repeat it to the Xhosa teachers and they going to make it worse, sir.
They are going to add something, like you swear at them, sir.

Nazreen: I don't like to work with Xhosa speakers because if we around them
they don't want me to talk or something like that and they just want to
play boss about everything.

Liezel: I don't like to work with them because they only talk Xhosa and we don't
understand what they are saying.

Nuraan: Sir, I don't like it because if we talk in the class they tell the teachers,
sir. But if they talk Xhosa and we tell our teacher, then our teacher
don't want to listen to us.

---

2. *Do you think it is important for Xhosa and coloured learners to work together? Why do you say this?*

Ghaleed: Yes, the teacher say if we work together, we will be able to
communicate more and come to like each other.

Abduragman: Yes, sir, it is important because if we don't sit together, we don't
talk to each other, we will fight with each other.

Johannes: Yes, sir, because we learn about their culture and they learn about
us and they learn how to speak our language and we learn how they
speak their mother tongue.

Nazreen: No, because ek het nog nooit by 'n African gesit nie . . . .

Liezel: Yes, sir, because we learn more about them and their culture and we
learn to speak also their language.

95

Nuraan: No, because my teacher like to speak Xhosa, sir, and we don't
          understand what she tell the children sir.

---

3.   *Are their certain people who do not take part in groupwork? What do you think is the reason for this?*

Nazreen: Because sometimes they think they giving the teacher a pleasure if
           they do the teacher's work and sometimes they just sit and do what
           they please.

Ghaleed: Sir, it is mostly the coloured children that don't want to work with the
           Xhosa children because the Xhosa children, they always talking about
           how this person look and how that coloured person look. They never
           look at themselves. They just think they are all that.

Johannes: Sir, there is some children in our class that if there is groupwork,
            they always doing something else like writing on a paper and doing
            their work and the leader must do everything. They don't even ask
            questions. You are the group leader and you must do everything
            yourself.

Nuraan: My teacher like to hit the coloured children and when we complain
          about the Xhosa children, she never listens to us.

Liezel: There are not a lot of coloureds in our group, but sometimes there is only
          one coloured in one group and we don't understand. Sometimes the
          Xhosa speakers, they only talk Xhosa because they see there is a lot of
          Xhosa children and only one coloured and that is why they talk Xhosa.
          That is why I don't work.

Abduragman: Yes, sir, because they don't want to speak Afrikaans. They just
              want to speak their language and when we in groups with them
              they want us to do the work . . . .

---

4.   *What can teachers do in getting Xhosa and coloured learners to work together?*

Johannes: Sir, by letting them talk English and not their own language. And not
            saying that because you are black you must do that work and
            coloured must do that work.

Ghaleed: Nothing, sir. They can put the children together but the children still
           wont work.

Abduragman: Nothing, sir, because they wont sit by us. They will sit by their

96

friends because they want to talk and don't want to work with us.

Nazreen: Sir, I say no because teachers put coloured children with black children and then if the teachers go out, then they go sit back in their places. And they cant talk one language because when the teachers turn their backs, they again talk their language.

Liezel: The teachers must explain in English.

Nuraan: By treating them equally, sir.

---

5. How would you feel if you were the only coloured child in an all Xhosa group? Why do you say this?

Nuraan: I wont feel right, sir. If I am the only coloured sir, and I speak, they will not listen to me. They will only listen to the Xhosa children.

Liezel: I won't feel right sir, because they talk Xhosa and I don't understand their language and I feel like nothing. I am not seen.

Nazreen: Sir, I wont feel nice because if I was the only brown child in the group, they will gossip about me and they will talk a lot of rude stuff about me and that is why . . .

Abduragman: I will fell bad sir, because they will talk Xhosa with each other and they wont talk with me. And they will do the work alone and tell that I did not do the work.

Ghaleed: Sir, I will feel left out because they will just make like I don't exist, sir.

Johannes: I won't feel good sir, because if one of the Xhosa speakers fight in the class then you want to tell the teacher, then every Xhosa child will want to stand against you. . . .

---

6. How do you feel about English being used as a language of instruction in the classroom?

Abduragman: I will feel good sir, then the children will work together and they wont talk their own language sir.

Ghaleed: Sir, I will feel good, but Sir, they can use English as a language, but while they sit in groups or next to each other they will still talk Xhosa.

Johannes: Sir, I feel good because if they speak English, we all speak English.

We will understand each other.

Nazreen: Sir, I will feel good, because then they can't gossip about the person.

Nuraan: I will feel good, because then everyone can understand each other.

Liezel: I will feel good, because then we understand each other.

---

7.   *Who do you like working with when you work in groups. Do you like working with your friends in your group? Why/Why not?*

Nazreen: Sir, I like to work with my friends because we communicate with each other and understand each other's language and we like always work together. When I don't understand things and she do, we help each other.

Liezel: Some of the Xhosas are Ok sir. Only some of them but the others don't .
. . .

Nuraan: I like to work with my friends' sir. If I say I don't understand a question and then I ask her, then she tells me and we always do our work together, but with Xhosas they don't explain the question if I ask them to explain.

Johannes: With my friends because if you fight with one of the Xhosa speakers, then your friend will come help you.

Ghaleed: There is one Xhosa boy I like to work with, because he work in our group and he always speak English.

Abduragman: Better to work with your friends, sir, because then you understand each other and won't fight.

Appendix B

Observation Schedules

Example One

Date: _____
Class: _____
Time: _____

General observations of the whole class	Yes	No
1. Are learners talking to one another?		
2. Are there learners who are not interacting?		
3. Are Xhosa and coloured learners interacting with one another?		
4. Are there Xhosa learners not talking to coloured learners?		
5. Are there coloured learners not talking to Xhosa learners?		

Fieldnotes:

99

Example Two

<div align="right">
Date:_____
Group members: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
</div>

	Yes	No
1. Are all groups working together?		
2. Are there group members uninvolved?		
3. Are Xhosa and coloured learners talking to each other?		
4. Are Xhosa and coloured learners working together?		

	Friendly	Relaxed	Animated	Confrontational
5. Is the tone of the group . . .				
	Boredom	Frustration	Restlessness	
6. Is there evidence of . . .				
	Free riders	Isolates	Bullies	
7. Are there any . . .				
Comments:				

100

Example Three
(Narrative System)

<div align="right">

Date:_____

Group No:_____
Name of Learners in Group:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

</div>

Observation Notes

Appendix C

Human Rights Session
Human Rights Worksheet

102