

Promoting an Awareness of Cultural Diversity through Social Development as a Learning Outcome in Grade 7 Life Orientation

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ABSTRACT The study under investigation has encouraged the researchers to explore and describe the promotion of an awareness of cultural diversity through social development as a Learning Outcome in Life Orientation among grade 7 learners at schools. The researchers opted to use a basic interpretive qualitative research approach in order to describe and interpret the phenomena under study with forty-eight participants selected from the Life Orientation grade 7 class in one school in Gauteng Province South Africa. The participants were thus representative of different cultural groups because the class consisted of boys and girls learners from, for example, Zulu, Tswana, N.Sotho, English, Afrikaans and Zimbabwe culture. The findings showed that teachers had attempted to promote an awareness of cultural diversity at the school in a variety of ways. This means that they still need to create a climate in schools such that diversity is celebrated, invited, encouraged and sustained.

INTRODUCTION

Cross et al. (1998) state that prior to 1994 in South Africa, State Education policy was guided by the Afrikaner philosophy of Christian National Education (CNE), which advocated that different ethnic groups should have different schooling systems with different curricula, syllabi and media of instruction. The education was divided into 4 separate schooling systems: Bantu Education, Indian Education, Coloured Education and White Education. It therefore becomes clear that race was an overriding consideration in creating the different education departments, and it may be that race is still a defining feature in South African schools. According to Vandeyar (2008), various policies have been developed and legislation enacted to encourage the process of desegregation in the schooling system of South Africa. Opportunities were now created for learners from diverse backgrounds to attend schools of their choice Vandeyar (2008). While it was hoped that learners would integrate and the seeds of a new society would be sown, other interesting demographic patterns emerged in South African schools. The researchers have observed that former White schools experienced an influx of Indian, Coloured and African learners, while former Coloured and Indian schools saw an influx of African learners. This means that schools in African townships did not see any influx of White, Coloured and

Indian learners. White learners, whose parents could afford, moved to private schools. Surjee (2004) makes the interesting observation that migration has occurred mainly to English-medium schools. This pattern of migration suggests that parents moved their children to schools where they believed the standard of education would be better.

While many schools adapted to the changing patterns of schools enrolments, many others tried to maintain the status quo, citing reasons such as 'insufficient space' and 'residing outside the feeder zone' to refuse admission to Black learners. A study by Vandeyar and Killen (2006) claims that South African schools lean toward "assimilative tendencies" and there is a "mechanical process of bringing together members of different groups." The study also found that race hierarchization is still a prevalent phenomenon in the schools visited. According to Moletsane et al. (2004), South African schools are still grappling with the apartheid legacy of separate and unequal schooling. They argue that true school integration, which promotes equality of access as well as educational opportunity for all, is still elusive in most school contexts in South Africa. Based on the preceding discussion it can be stated that in order to promote an awareness of cultural diversity among learners, the first step would certainly be to acknowledge that differences do exist. Therefore knowing about the different cultures within the South African context becomes important.

Background and the Problem Statement of the Study

Ndlovu (1998) claims that communities and nations do not exist in isolation and that homogeneous ethnic and cultural communities have been overtaken by multiethnic and multicultural cities and countries. He goes on to say that the multiethnic and multicultural nature of the world has become a reality. Furthermore, Cross et al. (1998) make the point that many countries have grappled with the problem of reconciling national unity with cultural diversity. Cultural diversity is indeed a world-wide reality. According to Vandeyar and Killen (2006) many nations have become more aware of cultural diversity, and during the past century, a wide range of international instruments have been promulgated, signed or ratified by many nations. In fact, diversity is such a global phenomenon that the issue was addressed at the Expert Meeting on Intercultural Education at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) headquarters in Paris in March 2006.

Within the South African context, changes that have occurred in the country since 1994 have compelled its citizens to adapt to a new social order, and to engage with the realities of South Africa's rich cultural diversity. This has impacted on both the broader society and on schools. More than a decade ago South African researchers, Lemmer and Squelch (1993) commented that schools' classrooms were becoming increasingly culturally diverse, and that school populations were being confronted with unfamiliar cultures, languages and backgrounds. This is a trend that has become even more evident in schools and the broader society today. In this study one can thus explain that cultural diversity refers to different people with different ways of living, philosophies and customs.

The question arises as to how these diverse cultures could be dealt with within the South African context. Jordaan and Jordaan (1998) offer three interpretations: Firstly, there is cultural segregation, where every cultural group has a cultural island of its own. This means that diverse cultural groups are simply accommodated within a common geographical space. A second interpretation is based on the principle of cultural assimilation. In terms of this principle, cultural minority groups will ultimately – through

minutely planned social engineering – assume the cultural character of the politically dominant group. As a third interpretation Jordaan and Jordaan (1998), propose the evolution of the multicultural person. According to these authors such a person believes in the enriching power of diversity, openness and inclusivity whilst respecting people's social identity. This implies a respect and acceptance of the similarities and differences of various cultural groups.

In terms of the schooling system, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of (1996), section 9(3) (4), embraces the third option (multiculturalism), and makes provision for the protection of individuals from unfair discrimination based on their culture. A respect for the cultural diversity of individuals is also promoted in the South African Schools Act (SASA) of (1996). It therefore stands to reason that school policy should reflect and promote a tolerance for cultural diversity. According to Seekings (2008) in recognition of cultural diversity, post-apartheid nation-building in South Africa employed the discourse of the multicultural rainbow nation rather than building a common non-racial South African national identity.

The architects of the Constitution of South Africa and education system of South Africa had a vision of a nation of people who would embrace our rich diversity by acknowledging differences, celebrating equality and respecting the right to choices. However according to Dawson (2003), legal amendments alone could not ensure the development of a non-racial society. People's attitudes and their conceptions of others needed to change. This was a more difficult challenge, as it involved not only questioning one's own identity, but also that of others.

As teachers for the past 20 years, we have first-hand experiences of the changes that have occurred in the country, particularly in the education system. As researchers, we have observed that there is a lack of understanding, respect and tolerance of different cultures within the school environment. This lack of tolerance, respect and understanding seems to occur whether the school population is culturally diverse or not, bearing in mind that in South Africa only a minority of learners are fully integrated in the school system. Seekings (2008) contends that a minority of children... including many White, Indian and Coloured children ... do undergo the experience of attending a multiracial school.

A new phenomenon at schools is the admission of learners from other countries. These learners seem to be accepted, but outside the classroom they struggle to find friends. They are ridiculed and bullied because of cultural differences. This lack of tolerance for cultural diversity is not always acted out in the classroom situation (in front of the teacher). When learners are out of the 'control' of some form of authority, such as teachers, these intolerances are verbalized and acted out.

It is imperative that this intolerance and lack of understanding of cultural diversity that is evident in the school be addressed. This is supported by Stavenhagen (2008) when stating that living together peacefully has become a moral, social and political imperative.

Life Orientation as a Learning Area in South African Schools

Based on the above discussion, there is clearly a need to address the issue of the promotion of an awareness of cultural diversity within South African schools. Before 1994 the subjects of School Guidance, Physical Education, Religious Education and Moral Education were offered at schools. During this time these subjects could have addressed the issue of cultural diversity and tolerance. However, in the early nineties these subjects were discarded because of rationalization process that was taking place in education. Life Orientation as a Learning Area/Subject was introduced into the primary and high school curriculum in 1997 and was then revised in 2002. This was part of the process of restructuring the education system in line with a non-racist, democratic South Africa as stated in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (2004). Life Orientation includes five Learning Outcomes: health promotion, social development, personal development, physical development and movement, and orientation to the world of work, thus effectively replacing the pre-1994 subjects of School Guidance, Physical Education and Religious Education. The Learning/Subject Area Life Orientation provides an appropriate platform to promote an awareness of cultural diversity through social development as a Learning Outcome. In grade 7 Life Orientation class, the Learning Outcome of social development is significant since the learners are engaged in various social activities, and are increasingly being

influenced by their peers. It is an ideal time to show learners that interacting socially with people who have different cultural backgrounds is inevitable and that an awareness of cultural diversity promotes positive interaction.

In terms of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (2003), the curriculum can play a vital role in promoting awareness between human rights, a healthy environment, social justice and inclusivity. The researchers have found that research on cultural diversity has been done for example Banks (2001), focused on cultural diversity and education. Adams, Bell and Griffin (1997), also focused on teaching for diversity and social justice. Therefore, many researches have been conducted on teaching multicultural classes, multilingual teaching and managing diversity in schools, but little has been researched on promoting an awareness of cultural diversity among learners in the senior phases in Gauteng secondary schools. This research will therefore attempt to fill this gap.

Social Development as a Learning Outcome

Social development according to Revised National Curriculum Statement (2003), deals with the rights and responsibilities as guaranteed in the South African Constitution (1996). This is in line with the focus of this study because learners in a classroom context are encouraged to know more about their rights and other related contents of the Constitution of South Africa such as: relationships, knowledge of diverse religions, unfair discrimination, socialization, democratic structures and cultural practices. When teaching social development as a Learning Outcome the teacher has to see to it that the learners achieve these aspects at the end of each lesson. This will enable them to acknowledge, respect and also be aware of among others diverse cultures in the country of South Africa.

Cultural Diversity in South Africa

According to Khoapa and Mzamane (1998), education should deny no one useful knowledge about self and others in the world. It should enable people to know that they have a history, culture and language. It therefore stands to reason that part of the education process should be to impart an awareness of the cultural diversity that exists within the country. According to McGurk (1998), students are invited to self-

discovery as cultural beings in coming to terms with the cultural particularity in relation to other cultures in which there is recognition of an essential similarity in diversity. Jansen (1998) speaks about the challenging resource model, whereby cultural differences can be used in the classroom to enrich the social and educational lives of teachers and learners. Jansen (1998) further says that a long-term goal is to create a climate in schools such that diversity is celebrated, invited, encouraged and sustained in natural settings, free of coercion. This means that learners and teachers should participate in a programme that promotes an awareness of cultural diversity. It is through promoting this awareness that we should be able to invite, celebrate, encourage and sustain cultural diversity (Jansen 1998).

In many South African schools there has been an increase in the number of learners from different cultures that attend the same school. This is strengthened by Vygotsky's theory, which is the socio-cultural (social interaction) theory. This theory plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition through mediation as Vygotsky (1978), states that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level (between people), and later on the individual level (inside the child). This theory is therefore relevant to this study as it focuses on the interaction between individuals within a complex society embroiled by various factors. Through interaction, for example, playing diverse games and holding cultural activities, LO learners with the help of teachers will be able to learn more about other cultures. It can therefore once more be stated that the relevance of this theory is seen when teachers are expected to teach, mediate and interact with the learners during various school sporting activities. Social development as a Learning Outcome of Life Orientation therefore provides an opportunity to promote awareness and tolerance of cultural diversity among learners at schools. This means that when learners find themselves in a situation where they should interact with learners from cultural backgrounds that are different to their own, they will be exposed to situations which they will inevitably face later in their lives.

Research Question

In the context of this background, the question arises:

How can the awareness of cultural diversity be promoted through social development as a Learning Outcome in Life Orientation among grade 7 learners at school?

The study will also be informed by the following sub-question:

- What recommendations can be made to promote awareness of cultural diversity through social development as a Learning Outcome in Life Orientation among grade 7 learners at school?

Aim and Objective

The aim of the study is:

- To explore and describe the promotion of an awareness of cultural diversity through social development as a Learning Outcome in Life Orientation among grade 7 learners at school.

The objective of the study is:

- To make recommendations with regard to the promotion of an awareness of cultural diversity through social development as a Learning Outcome in Life Orientation among grade 7 learners at school.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Henning et al. (2004), state that in a qualitative study we want to understand, and also explain in argument, by using evidence from the data and from the literature, what the phenomenon or phenomena that we are studying are about. Furthermore, according to Merriam (2002), the product of qualitative study is richly descriptive. Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon. For the purpose of this study a basic interpretive qualitative design was used to explore and describe how Life Orientation learners understand cultural diversity and how this understanding is shaped by their experiences and interactions with others.

Sampling

According to Merriam (2002), it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned. This is called a purposeful sample. According to Patton (1990), the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting informa-

tion-rich cases for study in depth. Therefore purposive sampling was used to select the participants in one secondary school in Gauteng Province. Participants were thus representative of different boys' and girls' cultural groups, for example, N. Sotho's, Tswana's, Shona's, English's and Afrikaans's culture. Identification and selection of participants was based on evidence collected by the researchers, such as class discussions, class activities and interactions. All forty-eight Life Orientation grade 7 senior phase learners thus participated in the study.

Data Collection

Interviews

Data was collected by means of focus group interviews and observation. Interviews were the primary data collection strategy for this research. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), in focus group interviews a purposefully sampled group of people are interviewed, rather than each person individually. The researcher chose the semi-structured focus group interviews because learners were given the opportunity to answer freely using their own words. All the focus groups' responses were audio-taped (with the participants' permission) and transcribed verbatim.

Observation

According to Adler and Adler (1994), observation consists of gathering impressions of the surrounding world through all relevant human faculties. Observation of the grade 7 Life Orientation learners took place at the school where the research was being conducted. This observation was done in order to attain a better understanding of promotion of an awareness of cultural diversity among the grade 7 Life Orientation learners.

Learners were observed in the classroom during their class discussions, peer assessments and debates on topics such as cultural diversity. They were also observed during play times and lunch breaks by the researcher who was a passive observer. Observations were recorded in a journal. From these observations the researcher did find that there were some learners who still undermine other learners' culture. For example, one learner mentioned that "wearing Zulu attire is not pleasing at all in this era".

Data Analysis

Bassey (1999) refers to the process of data analysis as an intellectual struggle with enormous amounts of raw material. The type of data analysis that was used in this study is referred to as qualitative content analysis (Henning et al. (2004). Gillham (2000), suggests that the researcher should read through each transcript and highlight each statement that makes a point. From the highlighted statements, a set of codes must be derived Henning et al. (2004). After codes were allocated, related codes were then placed in categories. The aim of the researcher therefore, was to constantly compare the data with one another, in order to identify themes that answer the research question (Mphahlele 2005).

Trustworthiness

According to Bassey (1999), reliability is the extent to which a research finding can be repeated, given the same circumstances and validity is the extent to which a research finding is what it is claimed to be. This research was conducted and analyzed qualitatively, thus trustworthiness was used to assess the findings of the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985), argue that qualitative researchers must inform what they do by concepts of 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability' and 'confirmability'. Lincoln and Guba (1985), suggest certain techniques that may be useful in establishing credibility. These include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, debriefing and member checks. The researcher ensured that prolonged engagement and persistent observation occur through interacting with the learners every week. Dependability was also established by describing the data collection and data analysis in detail, thereby providing a complete description of the phenomenon of investigation.

Ethical Standards

Ethical considerations are an extremely important aspect of qualitative research, and it is necessary to engage in ethical practices in all steps of the research processes, as mentioned in several studies (Cresswell 2008; Henning et al. 2004; McMillan and Schumacher 2001).

The following ethical measures were adhered to:

- The research proposal was sent for ethical clearance to the University of Johannesburg Faculty of Education, Higher Degree and Ethic Committee.
- Permission was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) District office. A GDE permission form was completed.
- Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the School Governing Body (SGB), the Principal and School Management Team (SMT) of the school where the research was conducted.
- Assent forms, together with an information letter was given to the LO grade 7 learners involved in the research as well as to their parents/caregivers.
- Information letters included detailed information on the purpose of the research and how data was gathered.
- All reasonable measures were implemented to ensure that the participants are protected from harm as a consequence of the research.
- Respect for participants was maintained and non-discriminatory language was used at all times.
- All reasonable efforts were applied in the research process to ensure confidentiality.
- The anonymity of the school and all participants were protected.
- Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any point, without any penalty.
- Participants were informed about the purpose of the research.
- Interviews were conducted outside of teaching time so as to ensure as little disturbance to the site (school) as possible.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the responses of the learners the following were mentioned: for example, one learner stated that, they were required to do independent research on an aspect of culture – in this case religion: *“We had to find a religion and find some information on it”*. One learner indicated that they were given written notes on cultural diversity: *“Sir, I remember doing like a ... there was a page or something – all this differ-*

ent religions – Islamic, Chinese and African religions”. Another learner recalled how each class contributed to the compilation of a table which was written on the blackboard and left there for all classes to see, discuss and add information. *“... er Ms X, she did a table on the board sir and then... er they had like holy books and they had all the cultures sir, and then under each ... under each of the categories they wrote for each culture.”* Another learner expressed delight at having to dress up and do an oral presentation: *“She said we must express each other’s religions and cultures by dressing up and giving like an oral presentation on how they were sir”*.

From the preceding section, it is evident that teachers had attempted to promote cultural diversity at the school in a variety of ways. This is in line with the idea of Jansen (1998), in which he stated earlier that a long term goal is to create a climate in schools such that diversity is celebrated, invited, encouraged and sustained.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this inquiry was to explore and describe the promotion of an awareness of cultural diversity through social development as a Learning Outcome in Life Orientation among grade 7 learners at a school. However, some learners tended to confuse the concepts of race and culture as they mentioned that they had both positive and negative experiences within the school with regard to cultural diversity. This means that as Life Orientation teachers, we need to put more emphasis on the above Learning Outcome in order to make learners aware of cultural diversity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are thus suggested for the promotion of an awareness of cultural diversity through social development as a Learning Outcome in Life Orientation among grade 7 learners:

- ♦ That the learners be made aware of the difference between race and culture. Practically this could be done through using teaching strategies such as role play and group discussion where learners from different races would be mixed.
- ♦ That the Life Orientation teachers at schools form a committee that is recogni-

ised by the School Management Teams (SMs). The purpose of the committee would be to encourage, monitor and enhance the idea of promoting an awareness of cultural diversity through activities such as cultural day, religious observance activities etc.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- ♦ Only one school was involved in the study, and this means that it would be problematic to generalize the findings of the study.
- ♦ The findings of the study represent only the Grade 7 Life Orientation learners from the senior phase and not the intermediate or foundation phase of the school. This may mean that the findings of the study do not represent an accurate reflection of the school as a whole.
- ♦ Since the researcher is the grade 7 Life Orientation teacher, his/her experiences and perceptions may have influenced the process of data collection and analysis.

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