An Exploratory Perspective into the Challenges Caused by Diversity in Teaching and Learning: A Case Study of the Tshwane West District of the Gauteng Department of Education

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Abstract

The aim of the research was to explore the challenges caused by diversity in teaching and learning. This study was underpinned by constructivism as a theory of teaching and learning. The constructivist classroom should be an environment based on inquiry which will leads the learners to deep understanding of the concepts under scrutiny. This study employed interactive methods, i.e. phenomenological and ethnographical designs. The researcher used purposeful sampling, in conjunction with the maximum variation sampling technique. The researcher analysed data through coding, categorising and establishing themes. It has been established in this study that most common challenges caused by diversity were domination and inferiority complex. Domination manifested itself in various forms, that is, majority language or age group over the minority, female learners over males, and fast learners over those who need more time to understand religious differences and learners who come from families which are well provided for over those who come from less privileged families. To address issues of domination and inferiority complex, teachers should encourage mutual respect amongst learners by addressing them with equal respect.

Keywords: Domination, inferiority complex, diversity, facilitation, interaction.

1. Introduction and Context of the Study

Most communities in South African urban areas are constituted by people of who differ according to racial background, customary practices, religion, culture and sexual orientation, among others. Thus, it is not always easy to understand and provide for their different needs. Schools in urban areas, as community structures, are faced with some challenges caused by diversity. The establishment of schools is determined by need and the number of these schools within a community is dependent on the number of potential learners, not by other factors, such as learners' racial or ethnic background and religion. A school in a community is expected to render a service of teaching and learning to all community members from diverse backgrounds. This means that a school will always be constituted by learners from diverse backgrounds. This article concentrates on the challenges of the facilitation of learning at schools with learners from diverse backgrounds. In other words, this article explores the challenges that are caused by diversity, which teachers experience when planning and facilitating the learning process.

Teachers experience challenges when facilitating learning in diverse classrooms and this has an impact on learners to work effectively together as members of a team or group. Due to their diverse backgrounds and cultural differences some learners have reservations about other learners' uniqueness; as a result, they criticize their judgments and behavior in response to the same eventuality. They evaluate others according to their own standards and personal prejudices. This may cause a breakdown in communication which deters learning. Communication is affected by language differences, ethnic idioms and figures of speech. Each learner interprets the statements of others according to his/her understanding; learners who are conscious that other learners may not grasp their intentions are reluctant to participate in discussions. Another problem with a class of learners from diverse backgrounds is curriculum development. Each learner has individual needs. Teachers are expected to plan and facilitate the learning process that will satisfy all learners' needs.

South Africa, especially the Gauteng Province, is a multiracial, multicultural and multi-faith society. All people, regardless of their grouping according to race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, social status, health, age, and disability, expect to be treated equally. According to the Constitution of South Africa, section 29 (Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights), everyone has the right to basic education. The State has the responsibility to provide basic education to all its

citizens regardless of their diversity. The Constitution of South Africa, Section 29 (Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights) also addresses one of the most visible elements of diversity, language, by stipulating that everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practical. It means that learners should not be denied admission to a learning institution on the basis of language. The researcher wants to contribute towards creating an environment in classrooms that will promote peaceful coexistence of people with different cultures, religion, sex or gender, sexual orientation, social class, age, health and disability. This research seeks to reverse the impact of apartheid policy of separate development in homelands that were demarcated on the basis of language and ethnicity.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

Research scholars argue that theoretical paradigms about knowledge and learning influence education systems of countries. This research was underpinned constructivism. According to Gray (2008:6), a constructivist teacher and a constructivist classroom are distinguished from a traditional teacher and classroom by a number of identifiable qualities: the learners are actively involved, the environment is democratic, the activities are interactive and student centred, and the teacher facilitates a process of learning in which the students are encouraged to be responsible and autonomous. Constructivist classroom is an environment in which student will have enough time to develop mental models of the content, which will assist in moving that knowledge away from primary content area, so that it can be applied elsewhere (Spiro 2006:9). Matthews (2007:61) states that the teacher is seen as a facilitator of learning, where learners are permitted to move around freely, use of time is flexible rather than structured, and evaluation compares learners to themselves rather than to peers, with de-emphasis on formal testing. Teachers need to recognise how learners use their own experiences, prior knowledge and perceptions. The constructivist classroom should be an environment based on inquiry which will leads the learners to deep understanding of the concepts under scrutiny. Social interactions and context is necessary for learning to occur. Constructivist classrooms are structured so that learners are immersed in experiences with which they may engage in interactions, invention and meaning-making inquiry.

Martin (1994:47) argue that although teachers do not necessarily follow a deliberate constructivist approach to teaching in their classrooms, a number of implications for teaching practice can be derived from it, namely:

- ➢ A constructivist approach recognises the value of a child's inherent curiosity
- ➢ Science is viewed as a dynamic, continual process of increasing a person's understanding of the natural world
- ➢ Knowledge construction occurs within each individual through interaction with other people and the environment
- ➢ The teacher following a constructivist approach largely functions as a facilitator of knowledge construction and takes the following alternative roles: presenter, observer, question asker and problem poser, environment organiser, public relations coordinator, documenter and theory builder.

In teaching and learning environment the learners' curiosity to learn should be aroused. This can be done by using attractive teaching and learning aids. As facilitators of learning teachers should guide learners to discover for themselves as they interact with the learning process. Knowledge can be regarded as an individual construction of reality through interaction with other people and the environment they live in. Constructivism is a theory of learning, not a theory of teaching. Therefore, instructional theories should translate the learning theories into instructional strategies. These instructional theories should prescribe series of strategies the educator should follow in order to produce certain types of learner learning. The objective of this research was to explore the challenges caused by diversity in teaching and learning. The main research question was as follows: What are the challenges caused by diversity in teaching and learning in South African urban schools?

3. Research Design and Methods

According to Creswell (2007:341), research design refers to the entire process of research, based on certain design principles. The qualitative research designs are categorised into interactive and non-interactive methods. Interactive is when the researcher collects data directly from the participant. There are four interactive approaches: ethnographic; phenomenological; critical race theory; and grounded theory designs. The non-interactive methods are methods that investigate the environment, current and historical evidence without direct contact with the participants like field observation, document analysis and artefact collection. This study employed interactive methods, i.e. phenomenological and ethnographical designs.

McMillan and Schumacher (2006:26) describe a phenomenological design as a study that describes the meanings of a lived experience. The phenomenological study is a process of understanding and reflecting what participants perceive about life/concepts from their own everyday experience. Just like the choice of a research approach, the choice of research design has an effect on the type of data collected. Springer (2010:403) maintains that a phenomenological approach differs from the ethnographic because it is more exclusively focussed on the subjective experience of the participant, while ethnographic approach examines individuals or groups in terms of how they represent a particular culture. Springer (2010:386) defines culture as the acquired behaviours, beliefs, meanings, and values shared by the members of the group.

It means that data that were collected through phenomenological design were collected from teachers themselves, whereby they were telling their own experiences regarding the challenges that are caused by learners' diversity. Data collected through the ethnographic design were collected during lesson observation whereby the researcher studied individuals or groups of learners that represent a particular culture, both as a collective and personal identity and teachers' reaction and/or innovativeness.

4. Data Collection

Sampling is an essential part of research because the results of the investigation come from the targeted population. Population, as illustrated by Springer (2010: 100), is the entire group of people on whom investigation is intended to offer insight, and the sample are the selected few who will actively participate as participants. The researcher used purposeful sampling, in conjunction with the maximum variation sampling technique. I selected four schools in the Tshwane West District of the Gauteng Department of Education constituted by learners of different ethnicity, customs, languages, religious and sexual orientation. Springer (2010:100) cautions researchers to guard against "sampling biases". Sampling bias is experienced when the sampled individuals are not representative of the targeted population, when the sampled individuals do not represent the diversity of the population and when the extent of attrition is very high. The researcher, as far as possible, made sure that teachers who were sampled represented all elements of diversity. All 16 sampled teachers were interviewed. Four out of the 16 (sampled) teachers, that is, one from each school, were selected for lesson observation and follow-up interviews.

This research required teachers to relate their experience and define its meaning and its effects; therefore in-depth interviews were employed. McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 350) describe in–depth interviews as open-ended questions that obtain data of particular meanings as individuals conceive or interpret their world and as they explain or make sense of the important events in their lives.

To be focussed yet flexible, the researcher employed an interview guide approach. Questions were planned in advance but the sequence of questioning was guided by the situation and the manner in which participants responded. Some answers needed follow-up questions which were not written in the interviewing instrument. McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 351) confirm that in the interview guide approach, topics are selected in advance, but the researcher decides the sequence and wording of the questions during the interviews. Furthermore, the researcher extended this by creating follow-up questions at times during the interviews. This is where active research fits in well. As indicated earlier, active research implies that both participant and researcher learn during the research encounter.

According to Merriam (2002:198-199), research findings are trustworthy to the extent that there has been some accounting for the validity. The researcher conducted this study in an ethical manner and used more than one data collection approach to develop insight together with the participant, through the way in which I have developed the results, also by liaising with participants. Van Der Nest (2012:93) agrees with Merriam when he maintains that the rich 'thick' detailed description of the background information and settings of research field serve to enable the reader to interpret general findings for future practice. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:142), ethics deal with beliefs about what is right or wrong, proper or improper, good or bad. The researcher sent an abstract of the research proposal, completed form to the Gauteng Department of Education that requested permission to conduct research in their province. The researcher indicated to participants that their participation was voluntary, they were free to withdraw from the study at any time and they have a right to refrain from answering questions with which they were not comfortable

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The researcher analyzed data through coding, categorizing and thematizing as described by De Vos, Strydom, Fouch and Delport (2011:335). Merriam (2002:195) augments De Vos et al.'s argument by indicating that data analysis does not start at the end of data collection, but data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity. The codes of the data in this

study emerged from the interview questions and field observational statements. The clustering of these codes resulted in the categories that correspond with the objective of the research. The themes which revealed the findings of this study emerged from the clustering of these categories. McMillan and Schumacher (2006:36) maintain that categories, patterns and codes are not imposed on data, but they emerge as inductive analysis proceeds.

The researcher employed the splitting method of coding. Saldana (2008:20) maintains the splitting method of coding encourages careful scrutiny of social action represented in the data. Initial coding was done by rephrasing each and every participant's statement in very few words to describe the core meaning or implication of each statement. All sentences or participants' statements that had the same meaning or implication were allocated the same code.

After review and refinement of codes, codes which were addressing the same objective were clustered into one category. Codes like, different language groups; different age groups; different gender, etc., were shaded with the same colour and clustered under "Elements of diversity". Further scrutiny exposed the fact that all the challenges were expressed or committed by both learners and adult education facilitators through communication and language-use. All codes that implied communication and language-use by teachers were clustered, and those which implied communication and language-use by learners were clustered separately. As I was following an active research approach, participants' statements regarding lessons learned and new knowledge acquired were coded and clustered as "Participants' lessons and discovery during the interviews".

After grouping of different codes into clusters, I had to decide which clusters should be categories, which ones should be sub-categories and which categories should be clustered to form a theme. The cluster of "Elements of diversity" was identified as Theme no.1 because it was addressing research objective number one and it is one of the main components of the research topic. "Primary elements of diversity" was identified as Category no.1. Categories of domination and inferiority complex, with their sub-categories and the role of adult education facilitators were addressing objective no. 2, which is, to identify corresponding challenges that are caused by these elements of diversity. After the clustering of codes into categories, categories were clustered into themes. The objective of the study served as a guide.

6. Research Findings and Discussions

6.1 Domination

One of the most evident challenges of diversity, which was raised by all participants, was domination. Domination happens in different ways. Teacher F said "*The class is divided into different language groupings that want to dominate one another*". Teacher A said "*These senior learners, somehow, dominated the young learners, though not deliberately*". The other teacher said "*Young learners, who are in the majority and also senior learners whose language group (Sepedi & Setswana) is in the majority, seem to want to dominate the learning process*". Teacher J said "*Learners of my language group, IsiNdebele, misunderstood me as discriminating, they joined me. They did not respect learners of these minority languages, they were intolerant and abusive. They started to dominate the class*". Teacher F observed that Sepedi-speaking learners, Christians, and learners who are repeating the grade seem to want to dominate the learning process. According to teacher L, senior learners who are familiar with the subject matter due to their background from the mainstream and those that are repeating the grade seem to want to dominate the discussions. Teacher C also pointed out that the privileged or learners of high social status also seem to want to dominate the discussions.

6.1.1 Signs and Symptoms of Domination

Some of the symptoms of domination that were mentioned by participants are: majority age/language group discriminate against the minority ones; senior learners undermine young learners by interrupting them when they struggle to participate in the discussions. Teacher H observed the symptoms of domination in his class: "*The class is divided into different language groupings that want to dominate one another. Whenever one expresses him or herself in his/her home language, other groups interrupts him/her claiming that they don't hear him/her. Other learners resist dominance and criticize those who complain. Code switching causes chaos in my class. Which, I think, learners deliberately want to frustrate one another.*" Another symptom of domination is ethnocentrism. Teachers' observations are in conformity that the age factor is the source of domination when they respectively maintain: "*senior learners, who are in the majority in my class, want all learners to think from their perspective.*"

6.1.2 Repercussions of Domination

This section highlights suppositions that participants presented as consequences of domination. Teachers identified conflict and resistance as one of the consequences of domination. Teacher P stated it as: "*Whenever one express himself or herself in his/her home language, other groups interrupt him/her claiming that they don't hear him/her.*" And the other group "*They resist dominance and criticize those who complain. Code switching causes chaos in my class. Which, I think, learners deliberately want to frustrate one another.*" Teacher L said that: "*learners who want to dominate are ones who cause conflict, "They are bullies. They do not want to negotiate the solution*". Teacher B said: "*Young learners repeatedly utter statements that suggest that they are intimidated. They said that "your age and numbers will never overcome us. They are aggressive. Learners who are in conflict cannot learn cooperatively*". Teacher L admitted that he may have exacerbated the repercussions by denying learners to use the own language: "*I have decided to discourage learners from code switching or use their home language when they express themselves.*" He acknowledged during the initial interview that: "*Failing to express oneself is one of the barriers to learners' participation.*" Other teachers' observations were that learners were reluctant to participate and others dropped out because they were dominated by others.

Most teachers observed common sentiments of young learners, which results from domination: humiliation, fear, shyness and withdrawal. For example, teacher G said: "*young learners feel humiliated whenever interrupted by senior learners. They are afraid to answer questions or make inputs. Learners in the minority languages are shy to express themselves in their own languages. There are those who try to express themselves in the language of the majority and others withdraw from participating.*" *Teacher C* identified withdrawal from participation, and dropping out as resultant behaviour of senior learners; and teacher E identified quietness, a feeling of isolation and dropping out of Tshivenda and IsiNdebele speaking learners and non-Christians.

6.2 Inferiority Complex

Inferiority complex, as highlighted by participants, is another challenge that is caused by diversity. Participants indicated that learners, in their diversity, which is, senior learners, young learners, learners from poor families and learners from minority language groups have a feeling of inferiority complex. Teacher G said: "*young learners, especially those in the minority language groupings display a feeling of inferiority or fear during learning facilitation processes*". Teacher D said: *Young learners and first time enrolments display a feeling of inferiority or fear during learning facilitation process*". Teacher A said: "*Young learners feel rejected and unwelcomed*". Teacher E also said: "*Underprivileged young learners display a feeling of inferiority complex or fear during the facilitation process of learning*".

6.2.1 Causes of Inferiority Complex

Inferiority complex happens when people have negative self-concept, which becomes worse when they experience domination. Participants in the study attribute the causes of inferiority complex to the fact that all cultural and religious groups are sensitive and irritated by negative criticism. Another cause of inferiority complex that was mentioned by some participants is fear of criticism, being ignored and being undermined. Young learners feel rejected and unwelcomed. Learners with low level of understanding are afraid to expose their unfamiliarity on the topic which is being discussed. Incapacity of learners to deal with big load of work also causes inferiority complex and may lead to dropping-out.

Some participants acknowledged that they might have exacerbated inferiority complex by ignoring learners whom they suspected they were struggling with inferiority complex. A teacher's disclosure of his religious affiliation may cause learners of other religions to feel less important as compared to those who share the same religion with an adult the teacher. Teacher N said "*Yes, it is possible that non-Christian learners may think I am not talking to them when I motivate them from the Christian point of view. I did know that there are non-Christians in class but did not accommodate them. Maybe that is why some of them have dropped-out*". Patrick relayed his role in the worsening of challenges of diversity: "*The problem with me was that I could not express myself in some of the learners' languages. Maybe, the manner in which I told them that I don't understand their languages sounded to them as if I am discriminating against them. Other learners, of my language, also understood my statement as discriminating too*". Patrick acknowledged that he may be lacking a professional communication skill, which resulted in conveying a message that he had not intended to learners. But he had the ability to correct the wrong impression and the courage to apologize to learners. Other teachers mentioned that they consulted their colleagues and assumed that teaching and learning might contribute towards low self-esteem of young learners because they give more attention to senior learners.

6.2.2 Symptoms and Repercussions of Inferiority Complex

Participants said that they observed a feeling of inferiority complex among learners when young learners were afraid to answer questions or make inputs, when they refused to stand in front of the class and present their reports, when they withdrew their participation. Teacher G said: "*They showed their dissatisfaction and inferior feeling by immediately stopping to talk whenever they were interrupted, then stopped to participate for the whole session."* She said that she, like other teachers, laid ground rules in class to foster respect. But it seems that her rules are not always adhered to.

Senior learners, in classes which they are in the minority, do show signs of inferiority complex. Teacher O said: *"Senior learners utter statements that suggest that they are being intimidated".* Teacher I also raised the issue of learners turning to silence when they think others are trying to overcome them. As she indicated: "*The underprivileged do not participate during the facilitation process of learning. They are always silent. They only respond when called to. I think that they have a feeling of inferiority complex because they have lost hope about their self-concept which has been dented by other learners."*

When asked if he did observe any groups or individuals who display a feeling of inferiority complex or fear during the learning process, teacher B said that it is not fear, but they are on guard against abuse. This is how he stated it: "*They always refer or remind one another of the previous abusive incidences which they will not allow to be repeated".* He said that they were talking among themselves as young learners as a warning to all class mates (the senior ones) not to abuse them. That is why teacher F referred to it as aggression. He said that: "*It means that fear of abuse lead to aggression".* Young learners and first time enrolments dropped out due to discrimination.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Domination manifested itself in various forms, that is, majority language or age group over the minority, female learners over males, and fast learners over those who need more time to understand religious differences and learners who come from families which are well provided for over those who come from less privileged families. Findings also reveal that domination is experienced when the language group that dominates the area or the classroom expects the minority to speak the language of the majority. Participants' statements during interviews suggest that non participation and attrition of young learners is caused by, among others, domination by senior learners. Findings from this study suggest that an inferiority complex is an emotional reaction to domination. Findings indicate if a learner's language is undermined, they feel reduced and alienated and they do not feel that they are in control of their learning process, which Knowles (in Crous et al. 2002) propagates as a characteristic of diverse learners. They do not have confidence to participate during the discussions. They develop a negative self-concept, which results in an inferiority complex.

To address issues of domination and inferiority complex, the researcher recommends that teachers should encourage mutual respect amongst learners by addressing them with equal respect, enable learners to shift preconceived attitudes and beliefs that are based on incorrect information, train them to recognize, respect and accept one another with their differences, and demonstrate to learners that their contributions are equally important, regardless of religious orientation, age, social class, sexual orientation and gender. When that happens, the integration dimension will be achieved; three dimensions of multicultural model of education (Content integration, Prejudice reduction and empowering learning culture) will be implemented; and objectives of the anti-racist model of education (Integrating multiple centres of knowledge and Recognition and respect for difference) will be achieved.

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