# Outwitting, outplaying, outlasting: teachers' survival and resistance in a post apartheid high school

Jacqui Dornbrack

## Abstract

Dramatic changes have occurred within education recently with the view of constructing a more equitable education system. However, entrenched practices remain, suggesting that teachers need assistance and support to reflect critically on their own and their institutional practices. While it has been recognised that training is essential, there does not seem to be sufficient conceptualisation of the complexity and difficulty of achieving 'second order change' (Evans, 1996) to shift entrenched beliefs. This paper discusses a case study research conducted at an ex model C[1] high school in which an intervention was designed to encourage teachers to become more critically reflective. Part of the intervention design was the construction of a regular, collaborative space in which teachers could meet and engage with sensitive issues.

## Introduction

Significant shifts have occurred within the educational landscape since 1994 in an attempt to achieve equitable outcomes and address racial imbalances of the past. Some of these changes include decentralisation of educational control, redesign of curricula, restructuring of management and administration, introduction of different forms of assessment and the development of the NQF (National Qualifications Framework) (Chisholm, 2004). In addition to this, the South African Schools Act of 1996 as well as policies such as the Language in Education Policy (1997) and the Revised

---

[1] Model C refers to previously white, well resourced schools that chose the option to convert to semi-private and semi-state schools with partial support from the government and partial support from parents via school fees and fund-raising.

Nowadays the term ex-model C is used in an increasingly derogatory fashion to describe schools who are resistant to full integration and who are bent on maintaining middle-class, exclusive practices.

National Curriculum Statement for Grades R-9 have been developed with the express intention of eradicating discrimination and promoting a culture of equity and human rights. Therefore it can be said that major changes have been instituted at a national level. However, there is a concern with the effective implementation of many of these policies at the school level. Criticism has been levelled at the government for their apparent 'preoccupation' with 'policy struggles' rather than with practice (Chisholm, 2004 referring to Jansen, 2000).

One of the major criticisms about school desegregation is the dominance of assimilationist approaches (Sekete, Shilubane, and Moila, 2001; Sayed and Soudien, 2003; Soudien, 2004; Carrim, 1998) and the lack of transformation of the racial profile of staff especially at former model C schools (Moletsane, Hemson and Muthukrishna, 2004). There is also a growing disquiet over the ways in which the ex model C schools favour a racially mixed middle-class (Fiske and Ladd, 2004; Grant Lewis and Motala, 2004) since the majority of black learners who have access to the ex model C schools tend to come from middle-class homes. Learners who live in more outlying areas (and previous townships) are frequently excluded from attending suburban ex model C schools due to high school fees (although they can apply for exemption), transport costs and the difficulties associated with getting their children home safely from school.

While desegregation has brought about some necessary shifts, the primary change agents, the teachers, have been largely left unsupported in transformational issues. In an attempt to address issues of human rights and racism within education, two specialist forums were convened. One is the *Discussion Forum on Anti-Racism* in the Education and Training Sector and the other is the *National Forum on Democracy and Human Rights Education*. The former, which is no longer active, was hosted by the South African Human Rights Commission in October 2000–September 2002. During the two years of their existence, a number of reports, capacity development, networks and recommendations were provided. The recommendation most relevant to this paper was the need for anti discrimination training and education and the need to provide in service training (INSET) for all educators (Manjoo, 2004). While no level for training was specified by this forum, the development of the *Strategy for Racial Integration* training manual clearly states in its introduction that training needs to be implemented at all education levels (GET, FET, including FET colleges and Higher Education institutions). (Department of Education [DoE], 2006a).

The second forum developed to address racism is the *National Forum on Democracy and Human Rights Education* that was established in 1996 by the South African Human Rights Commission and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). Their primary aim is to facilitate and support the institutionalisation of human rights education in the new curriculum and support interests and activities in the field of democracy and human rights education (Manjoo, 2004). They work closely with non-government organisations, civil society organisations, government departments and state institutions to help build a culture of human rights. Membership of the forum includes democracy and human rights theorists and practitioners, lawyers, paralegals, children's rights specialists, chapter 9[2] institutions, teacher unions and provincial and national departments of education (Manjoo, 2004). One of the major achievements of this forum has been the successful lobbying of the formal educational sector to recognise the need for democracy and human rights education and the development of the Standard Generating Body (SGB) to generate unit standards and qualifications on human rights (Manjoo, 2004).

In addition to the above support, a special department (Directorate: Race and Values in Education) within the National Department of Education (DoE) has been established to work with office and classroom based educators to build democracy and a human rights culture. They offer resources and a two-day workshop for teachers. They have recently launched their *Strategy for Racial Integration (2006)* which has been developed to 'assist institutions deal with the challenges of integration' (DoE, 2006). This booklet (also available online) describes the strategic approach as well as provides a framework of action for establishing procedures for dealing with racism and providing support in the form of interventions and evaluations to institutions wanting to improve racial integration. The implementation plan of these strategies spans from 2006–2008 and includes the provision of training of educators, managers and district staff.

---

[2] 'Chapter 9' are organisations developed according to the 'Paris Principles' to further develop the aims of democracy. One such body is the South African Human Rights Commission.

## Second order change

However, I argue that while these forums and strategies are useful, insufficient attention has been paid to the hugely complex issue of implementing training which goes beyond the superficial and results in *second order change*. Second order change “requires people to not just do old things slightly differently but to change their beliefs and perceptions”, (Evans, 1996, p.2). Central to achieving second order change is the need to acknowledge that implementation depends on the meaning the change has to those who must implement it. If we want teachers and school management to implement changes, we need to address how they understand the changes and how the changes will affect their identities, social investments, attachments, relationships and positioning in the structures. Because change provokes loss, challenges competence, creates confusion and causes conflict (Evans, 1996; Jansen, 2009a) understanding these feelings is vital to the successful implementation of any innovation. In the context of former model C schools, where the majority of the staff underwent their initial training during apartheid, issues of race, class, gender and language are bound to emerge and to evoke strong emotions. These feelings and emotions need to be recognised and managed with sensitivity (Obear, 2000).

Another aspect that needs to be considered when developing an intervention or training is the need to make sufficient time for change to be understood and worked through. Responses to change are so highly personal that individuals need to work through them at their own pace and become familiar with the new ideas and discover the associated costs and benefits. If the process is hurried, resistances are likely to become stronger and old values will resurface therefore training must include opportunities for teachers to “consider, discuss, argue and work through changes” (Evans, 1996, p.15).

## Resistance to change

People tend to resist change and to assimilate reality according to existing mental structures; knowledge structures that have been formed over the course of their lives; ‘knowledge in the blood’ (Jansen, 2009a). Such knowledge, while not unchangeable, is extremely powerful as it has ”been gathering since childhood, as well as having been handed down from before” (Macdara Woods in Jansen, 2009a, p. 171). This instinct to hold onto existing forms of knowledge and beliefs needs to be understood and worked with, rather than seen as a major barrier. Resistance, anger, fear and confusion are inevitable and any purposeful attempt to bring about change needs to address this aspect. Therefore the issue of teachers' identities and shifts in their identities as they work towards achieving reform needs to be recognised as a critical component of change. Van Veen, Sleegers and Van de Ven (2005, p. 918) argue that most research on teachers' reactions to change attend to the rational and cognitive responses and fail to explore the "layers of emotion that seem to be involved".

Pressure is also vital to innovation as it makes the change inevitable. Pressure usually implies the use of power. Power does not only mean coercion it can also mean influencing people to achieve goals. This influence is more likely to be attended to if it comes from above, as in the Headmistress/Master or the Department. In South Africa the policies and structures are in place to exert pressure. However the power historically ascribed to the school management and governing bodies of ex model C schools, has allowed these institutions to retain the status quo and avoid committing to real reform. Therefore it is significant that in the *Strategy for Racial Integration* the need for staff and leaders to reflect the demographics is clearly stated as a primary task. This is an essential aspect of promoting equity within ex model C schools.

## Change in South Africa

Having examined general concerns of school transformation, I now turn to a more local context: high school educators in post-apartheid South Africa. I believe that despite desegregation among staff, there are very few spaces in the schools where teachers of different backgrounds can talk openly about their past and critically examine their metaphorical 'knowledge in the blood' (Jansen, 2009). This knowledge has accumulated over years of living during and after apartheid and it impacts directly and indirectly on the ways they go about their daily work of being teachers in a school with diverse learners. South Africans in general do not easily discuss their past because it is painful and "South Africans don't want to go there", so argues Jansen (2009b, p.19). He believes that it is essential to talk through these issues as he claims that "if we don't talk about the past, we cannot go through the past" (Jansen, 2009b, p.19**).** Therefore the intervention that I discuss in this paper was conceived of as the construction of a space to facilitate teachers of different backgrounds, languages, age, gender, class and race to start talking to each other about the institutionalised practices in their school. However, it could not just be a social space for general discussion. It needed to be ontological and epistemological where teachers could take risks and openly discuss their concerns and understandings about the changes that had occurred in their school over the previous years. It also required of them to commit to addressing practices which were found to be discriminatory. I use the notion of thirdspace[3] (hooks, 1990; Bhaba, 1994; Soja, 1996) to conceptualise this space. Before exploring thirdspace, I provide the reader with some background and methods used to generate and analyse the data for the study.

## Background

According to Sleeter and McLaren (1995), the dominant culture of schools mirrors that of the larger society and teachers and learners willingly and unwillingly situate themselves within structures and practices that reinforce and constitute the unjust race, class, gender and cultural affiliations of their societies. Teachers therefore partake in a 'culture of silence' that teaches learners to accept and homogenise in order to 'fit in' and not stand out as 'different'. Rather than transforming the fundamental nature of the school and its rules, its sports and its practices, most schools have simply set in place mechanisms to help accommodate learners who are not white. These mechanisms include using cross-cultural music programmes and multi-faith assemblies (Carrim and Soudien, 1999). Many adjustments made by previously white schools are constructed within a discourse of disadvantage which perpetuates the notion that the black learners are the ones who must change to fit in with the existing norms of the school. These kinds of practices maintain discrimination and disallow equal opportunities for success but have become naturalised in the school. Therefore my primary aim of setting up a dialogical space was to encourage the teachers to become more critical so as to identify events, routines and discourses that served to exclude rather than include all learners.

## Methods

I was invited into an ex-model C school in the Eastern Cape (1000 learners, 40 per cent 'black' 60 per cent 'white') by one of the white teachers who had taught there for many years. She was concerned about certain practices in the school which she felt discriminated against black learners. After a discussion with the Principal and District Office of Education, I addressed the 50 staff, (47 white, 3 black) inviting them to volunteer to join me approximately once a week for an hour, for a one year period to critically reflect on issues relating to difference (race, gender, language, age, class and background). Initially seven teachers volunteered – all were white. Believing that it was essential to have as much diversity in the group as possible, I approached one of the black teachers and asked him to consider joining; he agreed.[4] This meant I had eight teachers, (one white male, one black male and six white females) whose ages ranged from 23–50. There was a variety of subject disciplines and three were Afrikaans mother tongue speakers and the rest were English.

---

[3] I use the single term, 'thirdspace' as used by Soja and hooks. Bhaba depicts it as two separate words, third space.

Each teacher was interviewed to obtain biographical and professional details and asked to discuss concerns they had with diversity in the school. On completion of the eight interviews, I set up focus groups where all eight teachers and myself met regularly in the library before school and during the assembly period. Being granted permission to meet during the school day significantly assisted the intervention.

Teachers were given readings and tasks to prepare for the focus group meetings (FGs). The selection of readings/tasks was based on issues that emerged from the interviews and discussions during the FGs. Readings included a summary I had written on the various approaches to multiculturalism; an article on gender issues in education (Dale Spender), and a diversity grid where teachers were asked to tabulate the top and bottom academic achievers in their classes in terms of race and gender. Focus groups were spent either discussing the readings or discussing any concern or issue that teachers raised. Sometimes teachers wanted to discuss incidents or events that had occurred in that week. While I usually had pre-planned some activities, I allowed myself to be led by the needs of the group. During the 13 FGs over the period of 18 months (the initial estimation of one year was insufficient) we spoke, argued, challenged, contradicted each other and became angry and defensive. At times, when the emotions became too intense, some teachers resorted to tears. Since the space was conceptualised within a framework of a 'thirdspace' I was able to make sense of the intensity of emotions and shifting, often contradictory narratives which took place in the library.

---

[4] Having only one black teacher was not ideal as it meant that he carried the burden of sharing the knowledge of 'the racial other' but I deeply appreciated his participation which was critical in providing alternative experiences of living during and after apartheid.

## Thirdspace

Recognising the spatial nature of humanity is essential according to Soja (1996, p.1) who believes that we are, and always have been "intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities". Rather than having expansive ideas with infinite possibilities, we tend to confine our thinking to established, fixed notions thereby limiting new understandings and the creation of new knowledges. Our thinking often revolves around established binaries of one or the other without a consideration of a third or more possibility. The concept of "neither one or the other but something else besides" (Bhabha, 1994, p.28) contests this narrow thinking.

Employing the notion of thirdspace to construct and interpret the practices of 13 focus groups of the teachers enabled me to see my intervention as a political act, one that deliberately sought to challenge the teachers to reflect critically on taken-for-granted practices that were unjust and discriminatory. This meant that the space I had constructed became, at times, "a difficult and risky place on the edge, filled with contradictions and ambiguities, with perils but also with new possibilities: a thirdspace of political choice" (Soja 1996, p.97). A sense of new possibilities was achieved by the emergence in the space of new discursive constructions. Some of the teachers shifted from talking about learners in essentialised, fixed ways and started to construct alternative discourses that included more nuanced, fluid notions of difference. It is believed that discursive shifts lead to epistemological shifts, which in turn result in transformed notions of subjects and subject positions (Foucault, 1972; Fairclough, 1992).

An important aspect of the space is that the teachers viewed it as a safe space where they could challenge dominant practices and disagree with each other without damaging the personal relationships that had been established. The concept of safe houses is used by Canagarajah (2004, p.121) to capture the *underlife* of students (Goffman, 1961 in Canarajah, 2004) in institutional contexts who resist dominant discourses by taking up alternative identities and practices. He explains that safe houses in academic institutions are sites that are "relatively free from surveillance, especially by authority figures, perhaps because these are considered unofficial, off-task, or extra-pedagogical". While my intervention cannot be regarded as 'underlife', 'unofficial' or 'off-task', it was away from surveillance and it allowed the teachers opportunities to share aspects of themselves that were other than those institutionally desired. The act of reflecting was legitimated by the Headmaster's approval and he never subjected the reflection to any kind of surveillance or monitoring. Teachers could say things that they felt unable to say in the more formal spaces of the staffroom or staff meetings. Also, it was safe in that the teachers agreed to retain confidentiality of what was discussed and this allowed the teachers to reconstruct and rethink their own assumptions and beliefs in light of alternative histories being shared.

Another important aspect that allowed the space to be safe was its detachment (in terms of space and time) from the institutional practices. This enabled the teachers to have some sense of distance and freedom to explore ideas and imagine previously unthinkable ways of managing difference in their school. It was in this sharing and introspection that the possibilities of thirdspace started to emerge.

Hooks (1990) deliberately positions this space in the margins, "a profound edge" which she admits is difficult, risky but also nurturing. It is difficult because the space requires of one to delve into personal issues and to listen to views that challenge and disrupt. It is risky in the sense that it seeks to challenge all forms of oppression and dominant groups do not easily accept such resistance. It is nurturing because the space is about dialogue, building solidarity and "engaging in critical dissent without violating one another" (hooks, 1990, p.19). This is a space of 'radical openness' where new epistemologies are collaboratively negotiated and ontologically experienced. As hooks explains:

> We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world (1990, p.153).

Particularly useful to my research is hooks' conceptualisation of thirdspace as dialogic, transformative and communal. She conceives of thirdspace as a space in which knowledge can be constructed, debated and transformed and where people themselves are transformed in this process. She also conceives of it as a space of affirmation and sustenance, a space where people, constructed by those in power as the Other or as 'different', can validate and share their ways of seeing the world.

I now present selected data generated from the interviews and 13 focus groups as well as briefly discuss the role that I played in this space and why I considered it be to be a 'thirdspace'.

## My role in the thirdspace

The roles and subjectivities taken up by a researcher during an intervention as well as the shifting roles and new subjectivities embodied by the participants is a critical component in a study such as this. However, since it is not the main focus of this article, I discuss it briefly conceding that it requires a far deeper and more complex discussion elsewhere.

I was originally positioned by the Head as an outside researcher coming to look at diversity in the school. Within the data gathering, I took on multiple positions: among others, I took on the subjectivity of a facilitator (to allow various contributions and allow for all to participate freely), mediator, (to manage conflict and strong emotions from becoming destructive), spokesperson for the group (during a meeting held with the teacher volunteers and management where they were silenced by the authoritative stance of the three-man strong male presence), empathic listener, devil's advocate (when they became complacent or uncritical about issues) and therapist (I frequently received emails and phone calls after FGs from participants who needed to talk more or who needed to explain something they had said). I made it clear from the start that I was not a neutral researcher. I was committed to promoting equity and while I encouraged teachers to discuss their views openly, I indicated that I would listen to all views, but contest racist, sexist or overtly discrimatory comments. My status as university lecturer gave me credibility and access to relevant materials and resources.

As the participants in the focus groups became more critical and vocalised more publicly (at staff meetings and in the tearoom) their disapproval of some of the school events and practices, my position in the school became more tenuous. Towards the end of the eighteen months, I was informed by the Headmaster that he did not approve of what I was doing at the school and that my "job as a researcher was not to be critical or ask what could be changed but simply to report on what I found". I was asked to leave.

I was not the only one who seemed to disrupt the established norms; importantly some of the group members started to challenge existing routines and norms. One of the participants took over the contested detention system in the school in the following year and another stood up during a later staff meeting and challenged a comment he found to be racist and insensitive. However, on the whole, the group found it difficult to make any long-term meaningful changes in the school and two of the teachers resigned a few months later and went to teach elsewhere. The teacher who attempted to change the detention system made significant changes but by the end of the year he was taken off the detention, despite his wishes, and told that his new responsibilities were to be viewed as a ‘promotion’. The detention was given back to one of the previous managers. Having provided this brief interlude, I now turn to the data.

## Data from the focus groups

### Teachers’ fears

A significant finding of this research was the high level of fears that the teachers in this school experienced. With such fearful dispositions, it is unlikely that teachers would be prepared to take risks and be outspoken about issues they found uncomfortable or disagreeable. It is far easier to ‘go with the flow’ and avoid causing conflict. Here are some of the reasons for their fears:

- Fear of the effect that challenging colleagues would have on one’s relationships
- Fear of conflict and confrontation
- Fear of disagreeing openly with someone
- Fear of pushing people further away from one
- Fear of standing up in staff meetings
- Fear of confronting management
- Fear of exposing oneself and making oneself vulnerable
- Fear of being seen to be subversive
- Fear of being labelled as troublemakers
- White teachers fear being called racists

It is significant that the teachers felt comfortable naming and discussing their fears which suggests that there was a sense of trust and nurturing in the group and that the participants were able to explore vulnerable aspects of themselves with their colleagues. It is equally significant that a number of their fears related to damaging interpersonal relationships by disagreeing with colleagues. Hargreaves (2002) suggests that the fear of confronting conflict and of destroying friendships among teachers is well documented and that teachers typically avoid conflict by establishing norms of politeness or non-interference. However, this reduces teachers' capacities to work through differences and disagreements (Hargreaves, 2002). It also reduces teachers' abilities to address issues in their school which may result in unfairness. Hargreaves (2002) argues that trust is required if teachers are going to overcome this fear. If teachers feel uncomfortable challenging and disagreeing with decisions made by colleagues and managers, the chances of transforming unfair practices are minimal.

The huge cost of dissenting with dominant views is clearly illustrated by one of the participants, Mr MM[5], who is relatively new in this school. He decides not to make the same mistake as he did in his previous institution:

> unfortunately the school I come from, uh, if you always speak your mind you are going to make enemies, whether you are speaking the truth or whether you are speaking. . . and uh, I don't know if I am ready to, to spoil certain relationships. I think I get along well with everybody on the staff, and I don't know if I'm ready to put that on the line for something that I don't know, that I might be convinced about but everybody else is not. That I feel strongly about, but everybody else is not. And I can feel strong about certain things, I must be realistic. Also, there are certain things I'm not going to change. Or that might take a very long time to change. So I don't think I've reached that stage and I've had a very, got close to a very in-depth discussion with one of the staff members and I had to stop along the way because I felt if I take it any further that, it might, uh, harm our relationship (pause). Its fine to be honest and to be open and, but I don't know, um.

His hesitation and reluctance to disrupt newly developed relationships in order to change things that are clearly not easy to change are understandable. Disordering established patterns of doing things at any school take its toll on those brave enough to speak out. So while Mr MM is fully aware of routinised practices that are unfair, he is 'realistic' about the sacrifices needing to be made and rather takes a more strategic position of keeping his views to himself and retaining his friendships among colleagues. However he is able to talk about this painful decision to the other participants thereby sharing a personal conflict he has within himself. Such disclosures invite solidarity and deepen relationships.

Likewise another teacher in the school reinforces the need to be selective about what one challenges as there are material consequences for challenging those in power:

---

[5] All names used are pseudonyms.

> But that is not the ethos of the school. The staff in the school are more, you're my friend and I'm going to favour you and I'm not going to say anything because I'm going to offend you and anyone, but you can't just be like that. You have to be given courage to become like that and you've got to be trained and you've got to be shown and it's a big distinction. And one has to be brave. It takes me saying, "MM, I disagree with you," and you've got to have confidence in me that tomorrow I'm still going to have a cup of coffee with you, and I'm still going to talk to you. It doesn't matter that I disagree because it's the issue, not the person. And that is a big culture in the school that is here, you know, and people are scared to talk up in meetings because they're scared. If I disagree with . . .then she's going to give me six extra periods or I disagree with Mr . . . he's going to cut my budget, you know, you know, there is going to be a way. He's going to stand and, "Ja, okay," but my departmental budget is going to be gone.

This extract reveals, once again, the conflict between retaining friendships versus making professional and moral judgements. This young teacher, Emily, after having taught at the school for two years, has clearly identified the staffroom politics and knows that not only are friendships affected by going against the dominant ways, but that there are also material consequences. If one 'disagrees' with the management one is subtly 'punished' by being given 'extra periods' or 'a cut in budget'. Therefore there are personal and professional consequences for 'talking out'. This teacher aptly identifies that teachers require training and encouragement, as well as 'bravery' to take on those in power. The issue of power and power relations therefore is critical in any kind of training initiative.

Emily, is able to discuss the risky topic of favouritism and unfair treatment among the staff as well as the authoritarian management in the school. It is obviously not easy to challenge management during the staff meeting but she is able to do so in this space which suggests that she has grown to trust her colleagues and trust that her views will be kept confidential.

It is in the space of the focus groups that teachers are able to talk honestly about their reluctance to go against the grain of the school practices. They are also able to criticise the way the school is managed. This opens up a space for others to voice their concerns and to become more critically reflective of the established norms and the imbalance of power between management and staff. So says Mr MM:

> We are not empowered. We are not empowered. We just come to school and do your thing then you go home. You are not involved in decision-making, you are not involved. Your involvement is as far as what management tells you what to do and what not to do, what's acceptable and not, what's acceptable and that. How does that leave you? Teachers' morale in general is low, in this, not as low as in the township schools but in another way. . .

Teachers in this school had few opportunities in which to put forward their ideas or suggest alternatives. The only space provided for them was during staff meetings which, from what they indicated, were highly controlled and regulated. This can be inferred from Emily's comment:

> He [headmaster] decides on what issues he wants to pursue: "Okay, let's wrap it up because we've got enough of what's going on here." That is the flavour in the staffroom. You deal with certain issues and if you raise one it's up to his prerogative whether he allows a discussion. Sometimes he does, sometimes he actually jots it down in a meeting. And at the moment there's nowhere you can raise something on the staff meeting again. Clearly in this school, limited opportunities existed for teachers to have a say in the running of the school and in making a space for new ideas and practices to emerge. Given such rigid conditions, it seemed unlikely that teachers would become change agents and push for change. However being able to collaboratively identify the constraints within the management structures, the participants were able to identify strategies that would allow them to give input and have their voices heard. Knowing that direct methods of challenging management were risky, they discussed alternative strategies. One was *canvassing support* before a meeting, although it could prove risky. As one teacher explained: You basically need to get a support group to canvas, but the danger is you need to challenge with the knowledge that your support group will support you all in whatever way, and I'm not convinced that you are going to have that support.

What this teacher recognised was that while it was relatively easy to commit to supporting a point of view; it was not always as easy to maintain that dissent in the space of authority and power. Constructing a space where committed teachers could share ideas and establish stronger relationships would enable them to form much-needed trust and solidarity.

Another strategy teachers used was to *involve other teachers perceived as powerful and credible* and *bring them on board*. This is what they believed happened at a meeting where it was suggested that the number of detentions given to learners be recorded on their term reports. The teachers, in an unusual show of support of each other indicated that they did not think it was fair to record detention sessions on a term-report. The unusualness of this kind of challenge is evident in one teacher's reaction to this:

> I was, I was, I was, I'm telling you I was shocked, [and] surprisingly, I enjoyed the fact that teachers voiced their opinions and they said no. It was a good feeling, it was empowering.

Discussing further why this particular meeting *worked*, one teacher, discussed the reasons for the success:

> Sorry, you know why that meeting worked? Cause, what you're saying is absolutely right and this is what takes so much energy at this school. It's like playing Survivor, you've got [to] outwit, outplay and outlast, okay. The reason why the meeting worked it's because Mary

> raised the issue. Mary was the one. Mary is perceived, and she is, she's very intelligent and the Head trusts her creditability and she raised the issue and she disagreed with it. She said I don't agree that it should be on and that everyone went (noise of exclaiming). And that's actually, I think, why that meeting worked.

This extract raises the important issue of power and credibility. Certain staff members are afforded more power than others due to a variety of attributes: gender, age, and years of service, personal characteristics, skills, leadership and types of knowledge as well as personal friendships. In addition, certain people are more powerful because of their alliances with those in power or with their perceived acceptance of the authority. Still discussing Mary the conversation continued:

> **Emily:** And Mary works with the reports. So, it was a credible person that stood up. . .
>
> **Alison:** I agree with what Emily is saying and I think it helps a hell of a lot if you are knowledgeable and you can convince people. What you're saying about hmmm, about Mary.
>
> **Emily:** She's also very non-threatening.
>
> **Suzie:** Hmm, yes, ja.
>
> **Alison:** But what does that say? That only non-threatening people are allowed to raise an issue?

Realising that some people had more power than others did, the teachers suggested that they could involve certain teachers whom they believed had the power but also who *felt like they felt*. While this did not directly give the teachers agency, it did allow them to have their views heard. Mary had obviously been able to work with the politics of the staffroom and challenge the headmaster without him feeling threatened. This demonstrates that schools, like most social organisations, are "arenas of struggle" (Ball, 1987 in Gillborn, 1995, p.94) and essential to affecting change is the need to recognise the central role of power and politics that shape the routine interactions inside schools' (Gillborn, 1995).

## Discussion

The evidence generated from the case study reveals the complexity of implementing any intervention or training. Two-day training sessions and once-off training are unlikely to develop the 'professional trust' (Hargreaves, 2002) necessary to enable staff to engage in sensitive issues that are required for the reconstruction of identities and practices more in keeping with equity and human rights. Providing regular spaces over an extended period where teachers can take risks and openly reveal their fears and concerns creates a sense of shared vision and camaraderie. Exposing fears and vulnerabilities allow participants to develop closer and more intimate relationships and friendships. Such relationships are more likely to withstand disagreement and criticism. Another important result of the focus groups was that the single black teacher realised that he was not alone in his concerns and that other teachers were also critical of certain events that had taken place in the school but that they felt disempowered to act on them.

The diversity in the group was essential. Being able to hear input from a black South African who had very different experiences during and after apartheid was a critical component of the thirdspace as it allowed white teachers to hear different knowledges and understand the limitations of their own knowledge. It is important that the construction of such a space should not be allowed to become a whinge space where teachers complain and gossip; it needs to be a space that encourages critical dialogue and enables engagement of critical dissent without violation (hooks, 1990). Rather than simply complain about issues at their school, I encouraged the teachers to identify the conditions under which such issues had emerged and discuss how those conditions could be shifted.

It is significant that during the period of the focus groups, the participants were able, through their dialogue with others, to shift their subject positions. An example of this is where the participants were reflecting on the lack of power and opportunity to voice their grievances; they positioned themselves as disempowered and marginalised. However these positions changed when their discussion turned to the multiple ways in which the school management had been challenged and how teachers had achieved solidarity against something they found to be unfair. Thus it can be said that the communal space allowed the participants to transform, both individually and collectively by re-examining and reforming their dominant epistemologies about each other and about their school as well as shifting their ontological beliefs and values.

A shortcoming of the design of this study was that it excluded the management of the school. The participating teachers started to make significant shifts but the management had not been given this opportunity and were therefore still ‘stuck’ in the same place as before. This led to conflicting views and discrepancies and polarised teachers from the management. A more constructive design would have been to have parallel focus groups with the management and to have held occasional joint sessions between the two groups.

A second possible limitation of the design was that the transformation had occurred among a small group of staff and the likelihood of it spreading among the other staff was small. Towards the end of the research period, I suggested bringing in more teachers but the group felt that it would disrupt their cohesiveness and trust. So we decided, instead, to give feedback to the rest of the staff to share some of the insights we had learnt. This limited sharing was not ideal. From continued correspondence with the participants via email and phone calls after the research had ended, I knew that some of the teachers had continued to work towards change despite the numerous constraints they encountered. If management had been more involved in the whole process, the continuation of change might have been more significant.

## Conclusion

In spite of the limitations, I believe that the construction of regular, safe spaces within schools led by either outside researchers or facilitators can be highly beneficial in working towards achieving more democratic school practices. What was significant about this study was that the teachers themselves identified practices in their school which they wanted to address. I simply facilitated the process and provided them with various theoretical resources and the space in which to reflect on and collaboratively explore these issues. Attempting to impose a predetermined, generic intervention would have not achieved the same levels of commitment and passion. Allowing the intervention to be led by the teachers themselves created deeper involvement and a greater chance of second order change occurring. Thus it can be said that the highly contextualised and situated nature of this intervention was a critical aspect of its achievements. While the exact intervention could not simply be replicated in any context, I believe that certain aspects of the design could provide useful pointers for further INSET for teachers.

I would recommend that the following points be considered when attempting to construct a thirdspace:

1. **The place, time and regularity of the meetings:**

   Changes take time and staff need to meet regularly and often if trust and solid friendship is to develop. Without this, it is unlikely that teachers will be prepared to share vulnerable aspects of themselves and share conflicting views.

2. **The composition of the group**

   The diversity of the group in terms of race, gender, language, subject disciplines, age, rank and experience allows diverse opinions and multiple views on issues. If everyone agrees with each other, the likelihood of growth and knowledge shifts are limited. In the model C school context, it is essential that different race groups are included so as to hear about different lived experiences to disrupt the often entrenched notion of one absolute truth. It is also important that teachers of different age groups are included as despite younger teachers coming from the 'born-free' generation, they still hold onto the knowledge transmitted by their parents (Jansen, 2009).

3. **The input the group will receive**

   The group needs to be guided and to receive both personalised knowledge from the participants as well as theoretical knowledge on concepts such as critical multiculturalism, equity in education, gender and racism in education and the dominance of 'knowledge in the blood'. Reading should not be prescribed and pre-determined but should be available if and when needed or requested. It is essential that participants are allowed to freely discuss their concerns and emotions but that they are presented in a respectful manner so as not to degrade any participants.

4. **The inclusion of an outsider/researcher**

   While an insider can facilitate a thirdspace, it seems that an outsider is more able to provide an 'objective' perspective on the school. An outsider is also protected, to a certain extent, from the internal school politics and is able use her outside position to push for change. However it is essential that this person is skilled, sensitive and ethical to ensure that the personal and professional lives of the participants are not compromised.

5. **The interlink with management**

   If the management of the school does not 'buy into' the proposed transformation, nothing significant can change. Therefore it is essential to allow a safe space for management to work through changes and their own fears and sacrifices in their own time and space. While there should be collaboration between the groups of teachers and of management, it is important to allow them separate spaces as the needs and responsibilities of the two groups are different.

6. **The power relations in the school**

   Since all schools are 'arenas of struggle', it is imperative to acknowledge and work with the power relations in the school. Instead of viewing power as only hierarchical, power needs to be understood as a 'productive force' (Foucault, 1972) which is

> closely linked with knowledge. As Foucault explains, “it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge and it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power” (Foucault, 1972, p.52). Therefore teachers should be encouraged to learn about the power networks in their school and to have knowledge of how things work so as to be able to use this knowledge to gain access to powerful spaces. Working with those in power and using one’s knowledge of how things work enables one to no longer view power as fixed and inaccessible but rather as power existing in all of us to make a difference.

In conclusion, this paper has discussed the many complex forces that come into play when teachers identify unfair issues in their school and want to challenge them. Teachers need to take on identities as agents of change and be provided with the knowledge and space to publicly voice their understandings, build up alliances and identify strategies to address exclusionary practices. They also need time and safe spaces to work through the losses and difficulties inherent in shifting perceptions and disrupting entrenched, hegemonic practices. Therefore if we are to assist in making real change in schools, we need to provide teachers and management with the resources and time to enable them to identify what needs to be changed in their schools and then equip them with the necessary theoretical and affective support to act on their insights. Generic two-day workshops can never achieve this level of reflection, without which second order change is highly unlikely.

## References

Bhabha, H. 1994. *The location of culture.* London and New York: Routledge.

Canagarajah, S. 2004. Subversive identities, pedagogical safe houses. In Norton, B. and Toohey, K. (Eds), *Critical pedagogies and language learning*. Cambridge, USA, pp.116-137.

Carrim, N. 1998. Anti-racism and the 'New' South African educational order. *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 28: pp.301–320.

Carrim, N. and Soudien, C. 1999. Critical antiracism in South Africa. In May, S. (Ed.), *Critical multiculturalism: rethinking multiculturalism and antiracist education.* London: Falmer Press.

Chisholm, L. (Ed.). 2004. *Changing class: education and social change in post-apartheid South Africa*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Press.

Department of Education (DoE) 2002. Values in education programme of action. June 2002. Website: www.department of education.org.

Department of Education (DoE). 2006a. *Strategy for racial integration*. Department of Education, Pretoria.

Department of Education. 2006b. *Values and human rights in the curriculum: a guide.* Department of Education.

Evans, R. 1996. The human side of school change.
http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&1r=school +change
Accessed 12/20/2006.

Fairclough, N. 1992. *Discourse and social change*. UK: Polity Press.

Fiske, E. and Ladd, H. 2004. Balancing public and private resources for basic education: school fees in post apartheid South Africa. In Chisholm, L. (Ed.), *Changing class: education and social change in post-apartheid South Africa*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Press, pp.57–88.

Foucault, M. 1972. The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language. New York: Pantheon.

Foucault, M. 1972. *Power/knowledge: selected interviews and other writing*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Gillborn, D. 1995. *Racism and antiracism in real schools.* Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Grant Lewis, S. and Motala, S. 2004. Educational de/centralisation and the quest for equity, democracy and quality. In Chisholm, L. (Ed.), *Changing class: education and social change in post-apartheid South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Hargreaves, A. 2002. Teaching and Betrayal. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice.* 8(3/4), pp.1–15

hooks, B. 1990. *Yearning.* Boston: South End Press.

Jansen, J. 2009a. *Knowledge in the blood: confronting race and the apartheid past.* Cape Town: UCT Press, Reprinted by Stanford University Press, California.

Jansen, J. 2009b. Racing to decency. Comment and analysis. *Mail and Guardian*, August 21–27, p.19.

Kostogriz, A. 2002. Rethinking ESL literacy education in multicultural conditions: the passage through cultural-historical psychology. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of New England, Australia.

Manjoo, S. 2004. A review of national strategies and forums engaging with racism and human rights in education. In Nkomo, M., McKinney, C. and Chisholm, L. (Eds), *Reflections on school integration. Colloquium Proceedings*. European Union, HSRC and Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Moletsane, R., Hemson,C. and Muthukrishna,A. 2004. Educating South African teachers for the challenge of school integration: towards a teaching and research agenda. In Nkomo, M., McKinney, C. and Chisholm, L. (Eds), *Reflections on school integration. Colloquium Proceedings*. European Union, HSRC and Charles Stewart Mott foundation. Downloaded from www. hsrcpublishers.ac.za Accessed on 17 /12/2006.

Obear, K 2000. Exploring the phenomenon of triggering events for social justice educators. Unpublished DEd Thesis, University of Massachusetts.

Sayed,Y. and Soudien, C. 2003. (Re) Framing education exclusion and inclusion discourses: limits and possibilities. *IDS Bulletin* 34(1): pp.9–19.

Sekete, P., Shilubane, M., Moila, B. 2001. Deracialisation and migration of learners in South African Schools. HSRC Pretoria.

Sleeter, C. and McLaren, P. 1995. *Multicultural education, critical pedagogy and the politics of difference*. New York: University of New York Press.

Soja, E. 1996. *Thirdspace.* USA and UK: Blackwell.

Soudien, C. 2004. Constituting the class: an analysis of the process of 'integration' in South African schools. In Chisholm, L. (Ed.). *Changing class: education and social change in post-apartheid South Africa*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Press, pp.89–114.

Van Veen, K., Sleegers, P. and Van de Ven, P-H. 2005. One teachers' identity, emotions, and commitment to change: a case study into the cognitive-affective processes of a secondary school teacher in the context of reforms. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 21: pp.917–934.

---

Jacqueline Dornbrack
Department of Applied Languages
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
and
University of the Witwatersrand

jdornbrack@sun.ac.za