



**Malmö högskola**  
Lärarytildningen  
Skolutveckling och ledarskap

**Examensarbete**  
**15 hp, Avancerad nivå**

# Voices on Apartheid

*A Minor Field Study on Teaching and Learning in the South African  
Reconciliation Process*

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Lärarytildningen 90hp  
Lärarexamen 270 hp  
2011-05-23

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# Abstract

This essay is a MFS case study conducted at a South African high school in 2010. The study examines how students and teachers perceive the meeting with apartheid in a post-apartheid classroom within the framework of History and English. The empirical data consists of observations and interviews with Grade 11 students and teachers in an affluent school environment in Cape Town. The study shows that there are gaps between how the teachers and learners perceive apartheid as relevant and relatable and how a silencing classroom climate limits the space for interaction on the subject matter. From the position of the South African steering documents and a socio-cultural perspective on learning, I discuss the didactical challenges that arise from a gap between the student and teacher perceptions.

**Key words:** classroom dialogue, post-apartheid education, reconciliation, socio-cultural learning, South Africa

## Acknowledgements

A special thanks to Laura, Clara, Sue, Ashleigh, Lexie, Jenna, Nickey, Elena, Jessica, Lara, Emma, Charné, Nicola and Michelle who have given of their time to share with me their valuable experiences and thoughts. Special thanks also to my supervisor Irene Andersson at Malmö Högskola, Gordon Aschilman, supervisor in the field, and the staff at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Cape Town.

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# 1. Introduction

Teachers are educated in a society of the past; they educate learners for the society of present who will live in the society of the future. A challenge... (Observation notes 2010)

This essay is the result from a Minor Field Study conducted in the Cape Town area, South Africa, 2010. With its history of apartheid and wide-ranging work with reconciliation, the choice of studying South Africa was motivated by an interest to see how a conflict can be taught in a post-conflict society which springs from my academic background within the fields of Peace Studies and Education.

My initial plan to study the work of an organization focusing on Reconciliation within the school arena proved unviable due to the practical circumstances on location. However, the organization's focus on teachers' trauma of apartheid raised questions of what happens when apartheid is taught in class. The National Curricula states that "the imperative to transform South African society[...] stems from a need to address the legacy of apartheid in all areas of human activity and in education in particular (Department of Education 2002:7). Every day teachers of the apartheid generation meet learners raised in the democratic 'Rainbow Nation' who they are to educate for the future South Africa. The new path my research took sprung from the unanswered questions of when the focus is on the teachers' experiences of apartheid, where does it leave the learners?

With this question at issue, I chose to study a Capetownian High School. The intention was to focus on student-teacher interaction when apartheid was taught. Due to a major teacher strike in South Africa, learners and teachers were stressed to finish the syllabus by the end of the year, thus restricting the possibility to conduct a comprehensive study on classroom interaction. However, my initial observations of the classroom environment raised questions about what I could not see through observations, namely how teachers and students experience the meeting with apartheid in the classroom. Consequently, the student and teacher attitudes and experiences, presented in interviews, have become the focus of this essay. By using Olga Dysthe's

concept of a multi-voiced classroom, I will discuss how a generational gap can affect the learning environment when apartheid is met in the post-apartheid classroom.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 The South African Context

South Africa has a violent history of racial discrimination and apartheid. The operative concept of apartheid, meaning *separateness*, was legislated by the Afrikaner-dominated National Party after winning the 1948 election (Fiske and Lade 2005). Apartheid began as a means for 'white' supremacy and control over land and space. However, the laws came to extend further to solidify racial separation and securing the social, economic and political privileges to the 'white' ruling minority (Fiske and Lade 2005:41-43, Warden 2007:73-98). The Bantu Education Act (BEA), introduced in 1953, has been an instrument in constructing segregation and manifesting the concept of 'racial' identities and 'racial' hierarchies (Soudien 2001, Wedekind 2001). BEA meant that learners were prepared differently depending on what position they were expected to occupy in society based on their ethnic, social, economic and political identity (Fiske and Lade 2005:45). The high schools that did cater for African learners taught according to a racist and eurocentric syllabus and were extremely poorly supplied for since funding was allocated according to 'race'. Thus, schools became, in the words of Carim Soudien, sights for "playing out the apartheid agenda" (Soudien, 2001:106).

In the 1990s a peace process was initiated aiming at developing a democratic change in South Africa. The 1996 constitution abolished the previous apartheid system and constituted a democratic state acknowledging equality and human rights and freedoms. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established as a step in the peace process towards reconciling conflicting groups (Bray and Jourbert 2007:50, Warden 2007:160-166). South Africans were to reconcile the wrongs of the past and live unified under the new nationalistic identity promoted as the "Rainbow nation" (Siebörger 2000). With political circumstances dramatically changing post apartheid, what did this come to mean for the educational system?

## 2.2 Education for Peace and Reconciliation

In post- conflict societies the educational system is often assigned a role in peace process to redress inequalities and promote ‘values of peace’(Bar-Tal 2010:22-26). This often proves difficult as the very same institutions are often used during conflicts to systematically spread propaganda and legitimize the ruling group’s use of violence (Harris 2010:16-19, UNESCO 2000:9-14). This has been the case in many conflict torn societies, so also in South Africa (Fiske and Lade 2005:23, Weldon 2009:19, Bar-Tal 2010:29). In constructing a democratic South Africa, it was essential to the ANC government to create a new educational system (Fiske and Lade 2005, Bray and Joubert, 2007). After a transition period following the installation of the new government, a new curriculum came in 1997. It was referred to (somewhat confusingly) as the Curriculum 2005 (C2005). In the year 2000, a revision of the C2005 started, resulting in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (NCS). Coupled with a *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (Department of Education 2001) the NCS remains an important policy document in implementing the idea of a democratic and inclusive ‘Rainbow nation’.

Despite having moved from a differential policy enforced by apartheid to an inclusive curriculum, educational change in South Africa has been slow process (Inglis 2008:37). One of the many challenges that face South African educators in post-apartheid classrooms is how to deal with South Africa’s past and its effect on the contemporary society within an educational context. With references to apartheid spread across the curricula, educators are not only to teach their learner about the wrongs of the past, but also to prepare them for a future South Africa. While most of the teachers are of a generation that has experienced apartheid first hand, their students currently in grade 10-12<sup>1</sup> are raised in the post-apartheid era and live in a society that struggles to address the structural discrimination that years of apartheid left behind. Standing before a unique generational gap between students and teachers in relation to apartheid, it is relevant to examine if there is a difference in students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards teaching and learning about apartheid and what pedagogical challenges this poses for South African educators.

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<sup>1</sup> Learners in Grade 10-12 are 16-18 years

### 3. Purpose and Research Questions

The question at issue 17 years after the abolition of apartheid is what happens in the classroom when teachers of the apartheid generation are to teach students of the ‘Rainbow nation’-generation on issues relating to apartheid<sup>2</sup>. Since it is my conviction that students of the post-apartheid generation face their own challenges in the meeting with apartheid, a study that includes both teacher and student voices is called for. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine how teachers (of History and English) and their learners relate to the meeting with apartheid in the classroom. I intend to discuss within the framework of the South African steering documents and current theories of learning the didactical challenges that these attitudes can pose.

In order to investigate the question at issue, I have conducted a Minor Field Study at a well-resourced high school in Cape Town, South Africa. The questions that guide this study are:

- How do the students and teachers experience the meeting with apartheid in the classroom?
- How can a socio-cultural theory of learning be used to analyze the didactical challenges that these attitudes pose?

This essay will approach teaching apartheid across the curricula rather than seeing it as an isolated historical content. Though arguably all subjects have a responsibility to address and re-address apartheid legacy, the limitations of this essay has made it necessary to restrict the study to two subjects, *History* and *Home Language/English*.

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<sup>2</sup> In this essay I will refer to Apartheid not as an isolated phenomenon of the past. Apartheid legacy will be used in a wider definition in this essay to include the remaining structures of the identity-based conflict, the socio-economic segregation, and the political measures readdressing these inequalities. This essay will gain on a broader approach to Apartheid legacy to capture a holistic idea of South African value education (*värdegrund*, for a conceptual discussion on English and Swedish see Colnerud 2004:82.

## 4. Theoretical Approach

This chapter begins by giving an account of the central assumptions of a socio-cultural theory of learning. I will introduce the concept of a *multi-voiced classroom* which will be used as an analytical framework of the empirical data. Thereafter, I will account for the development of the South African curriculum and discuss how to situate teaching apartheid and apartheid legacy within this framework.

### 4.2 A Socio-Cultural Perspective on Learning

A socio-cultural perspective is based on a constructivist idea that assumes that knowledge does not exist independently of the learner. The learner is not a passive recipient of ‘objective’ knowledge but active in a process of constructing knowledge by making sense of the world around her (Egidius 2002:12-13). Hence, learning does not equal a mere reproduction of information or ‘facts’. A constructivist position assumes that the learner connects new knowledge with his/her preexisting knowledge structures. Thus, the learner can develop a new understanding which in turn can be applied in other contexts (Illeris 2007:71-98, Säljö 2000:141). While a constructivist approach is concerned with the knowledge construction *within* the individual learner, a socio-cultural perspective focuses on how knowledge is constructed in the interplay *between* individuals (Säljö 2000:65, Dyshe 2001:41).

From a socio-cultural perspective language is closely interlinked with thinking, thus a key tool in the learning process. According to Vygotskij, whose ideas are central to a socio-cultural approach, we use language to think and to communicate our thoughts to others (Vygotskij in Säljö 2000). Hence, learning is a communicative process that takes place in a dialogue both between and within the learner. By partaking in a social setting the learner shapes and is shaped by the values and norms of the group (Säljö 2000:21-23,38). According to John Dewey, whose ideas of interaction and cooperative learning lay a foundation for a socio-cultural theory, all learning is situated within the social and cultural context in which it is constructed (Dewey in Vaage 2001:135). Hence,

experiences made in social situations will always depend on the context. Hence, Dewey argues that all learning is contextualized. However, knowledge and skills acquired in one situation constitute tools that can be applied when facing problems in other situations which will promote reflexive thinking (ibid.). Dewey's critique against institutionalized learning, more than 80 years ago, was that schools de-contextualized knowledge into isolated subjects which did not take into account student experiences of life (Dewey 1938:67). School should, according to Dewey, strive for creating as 'authentic activities' as possible, an idea that has influenced educationalists worldwide since.

When assuming that learning is an interactive, communicative and social process, this in turn will affect the learning environment and classroom practice envisaged (Säljö 2000:37,106; Dysthe 1995:48). Olga Dysthe (1995), who has studied classroom interaction from a socio-cultural perspective, argues that the conditions for meaningful social interaction will affect the learning process. Dysthe argues that teachers should strive for a multitude of voices contributing to the classroom dialogue, what Dysthe calls a multi-voiced (*flerstämmigt*) environment (ibid).

However, to allow for the student voices to be heard does not automatically equal a multi-voice environment. A multi-voiced environment presupposes that conversation is guided by open and authentic questions using the students' experiences as point of departure. These types of questions will allow for the learner to reflect on his/her own understanding rather than reproducing predetermined answers (Dysthe 1995:59). Striving for a multi-voiced classroom, it is important to create a learning environment in which the learner feels accepted. The learner must feel that his or her opinions and knowledge are valued, which in turn will affect the motivation of the learner (Dysthe 2001:38-39). Furthermore, motivation will depend on, whether or not, learning and what is taught is perceived as meaningful and relevant within a group.

In a classroom where only the teacher's voice dominates, students are most likely to repeat the official discourse or the authorized version of a subject/learning area (Dysthe 1995:247). However, in an environment that allows for a multitude of options and ideologies to be voiced, an ethical dilemma arises when these voices do not uphold values of democracy and equality. Dysthe argues that the teacher should not fall to the temptation of prescribing the 'correct' opinions for the students. Dysthe argues that powerful teaching moments arise in the meeting and breaking of opinions (1995:67). Instead, it is the role of the educator to pass on the cultural and ethical values to the next generation, not as authoritarian words, but, Dysthe argues, by giving the students

opportunities to critically investigate the consequences of their choices. Only by their own conviction can the learners make these values their own and apply them in their own lives (Dysthe 1995:247).

Socio-constructivist ideas have dominated Western education and curricula development in the recent decades, but let us move to the South African context to examine what political and pedagogical influences that have impinged post-apartheid curricular development.

## 4.2 Steering Documents

Official documents are according to educational researcher Amos Hatch “powerful indicators of the value systems operating within institutions” providing the researcher a sense of the history and culture related to the context studied (2002:116). The curricular reforms since the fall of apartheid have caused much debate of how, why, and where to include apartheid in the syllabus. Hence, the values and outcomes associated with teaching apartheid within the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) will situate this study within a political and cultural context.

### 4.2.1 Towards a Democratic Curriculum (1997-2002)

The first curriculum reform of 1997, Curriculum 2005 (C2005 sic!), was considered a counter reaction to the suppressing curricula of the apartheid regime. It focused on values and skills previously denied such as inclusion and critical thinking (Haber 2001:47). The political desire to move away from the propaganda machine of the apartheid resulted in the fact that traditional content bound subjects were replaced by outcome based learning areas with free choice of content. Teachers were encouraged to create their own learning material and to refrain from using textbooks (see Chisholm 2004, Weldon 2009). Relying on inspiration from Freirean ‘freedom’ pedagogy, the C2005 was criticized for being a political rather than a pedagogical project (Harely and Wederkind 2004:198).

In the C2005, the responsibility to deal with the apartheid legacy was allocated to Human and Social Sciences Learning Area. Historians engaged in a critical debate regarding the lack of outcomes related to the history subject. Gail Weldon, who has looked at curricula development in post-conflict societies, argues that to omit History

avoided open confrontation about the official narratives of apartheid in a time when the identity based conflict was still evident (Weldon 2009:263). The tactic, Weldon argues, reflected the government's desire to allow space for reconciliation during a time of fragile democratic transition. However, when educators were free to choose the historical content, many of historically advantaged 'white' schools chose to continue teaching a Eurocentric syllabus that did not support the democratic values of the new nation (Weldon 2009:175). At the same time the general critique towards the new outcome-based education of the C2005 was that it failed to provide adequate training for teachers to address the more complex pedagogical ideals and issued it raised. The curricula implementation was neither coupled with the resources needed to educate teachers on the pedagogical ideas or the values underpinning the curricula. Scholars agreed that the "pendulum had swung too far" and a revision of the C2005 started (Weldon 2009, Chisholm 2004, Harely and Wederkind 2004).

#### 4.2.2 Curricula Revision (2002)

The Revised National Curriculum Statement (NCS) was launched 2002 to rework the shortcomings of the C2005. In order to clarify the role of the curricula as a building block of a new national identity, the Educational Department compiled *The Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (Department of Education 2000). The document encourages teachers and students to stand united behind the values of "democracy, human rights, social justice, equity, equality, non-racism, non-sexism, *ubuntu*<sup>3</sup> openness, respect, accountability and reconciliation" (ibid. p 3-5). The Manifesto is quoted in the NSC as the value basis for South African Education. The *Learner Envisaged* in the NSC is "one who will be imbued with the Constitutional values and act in the interests of a society based on respect for democracy" (Department of Education 2002:17). Furthermore, the NSC states that *all* subjects have a responsibility to readdress the apartheid legacy and deal with human rights issues.

In addition to introducing pertinent reference to the educational values, the NSC reintroduced comprehensive Subject Statements, among them History. The outcome-based curricula encouraged a learner centered and activity based pedagogy. The outcomes are divided into Critical Outcomes, concerning skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking, and Developmental Outcomes, aiming at creating responsible and

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<sup>3</sup> Human Dignity

active citizens. The influence of a constructivist approach is evident and it echoes Dewey's idea that the purpose of education is that "learners are to acquire and apply knowledge and skills that are meaningful in their own lives" (ibid. p. viii).

### 4.2.3 History

When moving from a general background to a finer-grained view of specific subject statements, History is the only subject that makes explicit connections to apartheid as a proposed content in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase (Grade 10-12). From being omitted in the C2005, *The Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (Department of Education 2001) assigned a special role to the History in promoting tolerance and shaping the nationalistic identity through narratives of the past (see also Weldon, 2005, 2009, Chisholm 2004). Historian and educationalist Rob Siebörger (2005) argues that the reintroduction of a core content was seen to favor the re-building of a nation united behind the reconciliatory path South Africa had chosen (p. 2-3).

The debate following the reintroduction of History concerned what would constitute the narrative of the past. The curricula approach was to include a number of narratives/voices should be included across ethnic, social, cultural, gender, age, geographical group and coupled with a focus on skills to deconstruct these narratives (Chisholm 2004:185-187). The outcomes in History, Weldon argues, were included as a means to counteract the apartheid propaganda and avoid that a historical narrative would become hegemonic (Weldon 2009:179). Hence, focus was on teachers to become agents of change and political tools in constructing knowledge and deconstructing narratives.

Apartheid history and the reconciliation process should be engaged by studying different sources, divergent opinions and voices, which should teach learners to think in a rigorous and critical manner about society (Department of Education 2003a:10). Four learning outcomes guide the history syllabus: "The learner should be able to; acquire and apply historical enquiry skill; to use historical concepts in order to analyse the past; to construct and communicate historical knowledge and understanding; to engage critically with issues around heritage." (ibid. 11-13). In conclusion, the NSC suggests that Historical knowledge should not be passed on as 'facts' from one generation to another. Learners should critically engage in a communicative interplay where students' voices meet different narratives/sources, which is in line with a socio-cultural perspective.

Is History the only subject that deals with the apartheid legacy in SA schools? Before we answer this question we must consider whether to consider apartheid as a prescribed content or as a set of structures influencing contemporary South Africa that are necessary to address according to the values basis of the curricula<sup>4</sup>. In this essay I have chosen the later and will thus examine how apartheid discussions surface within the framework of *Home Language* (in this case study *English*).

#### 4.2.4 Home Language/English

Language education was, in addition to History, given a specific responsibility in readdressing apartheid by the close connection between identity and language (Department of Education 2001). The objective of studying English/Home Language (compulsory in Grade 10-12) is to “use language as a tool for critical and creative thinking” (Department of Education 2003b:10). This view presupposes that “knowledge is socially constructed through the interaction between language and thinking”, hence embracing the core assumption of a socio-cultural theory (ibid p10). The NCS states that “[t]he Language curriculum prepares learners for the challenges they will face as South Africans and as members of the global community” (ibid p. 9). While there are no explicit references to the apartheid as a content, learners should engage in texts that allows the learners “explore and reflect on the interrelationship of their own existence with that of others”(ibid p13). The outcomes state that learners should develop critical awareness of how values and power relations are embedded in language, and be able to critically analyze different narratives/texts, identify values and assumptions and respond critically (ibid.p11-13). Hence, both *language* and *history* studies presupposes that learners engaged with a number of sources in order to develop critical thinking on current issues in South Africa.

In a closer study of the NCS, traces of the apartheid legacy can be said to have influenced the curricula both in terms of values, suggested content and the skills envisaged. Furthermore, it also provided an insight in the view of learning underpinning the curricula, arguably relying on ideas central to a socio-cultural/constructivist theory.

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<sup>4</sup> *Social Science* is not available after the Foundation Phase of Grade R-9 and thus not relevant for this study.

## 5. Previous Research

Given that the purpose of this essay is to examine how teachers and learners relate to the meeting with apartheid in an educational context, I will offer an overview of previous research. Since this is a question of both policy and practice, this chapter begins outlining findings from a policy level, thereafter going through policy implementation, in order to arrive at discussing classroom based research.

Curricular reform as a means to counter apartheid's negative impact on the educational system has been a well researched topic. Research on policy development has concluded that replacing the Bantu Education act with a learner-based pedagogy was accompanied by a difficult implementation process (Harley and Wederkind 2004:222). A general tendency observable from post-apartheid educational research is that previously advantaged schools with academically trained teachers and access to resources benefitted from the curricula reform. On the other hand previously disadvantaged schools have experienced a difficult transition to the outcomes-based education as a result of insufficient access to resources and opportunities to in-service training (Harley and Wederkind 2004, Fiske and Lade 2005).

Relevant to this case study is that Harley and Wederkind's (2004) research indicates that historically advantaged schools have generally maintained high pass rates throughout the reforms. However, quantitative statistics measuring pass rates say little about how outcomes have been reached and what values that have saturated the education. This is interesting in regards to the critique voiced in Chisholm (2004) that the curriculum has been accused of "following a path of denunciation of the past and celebration of the present and new heroes" (2004:188). Linda Chisholm, who partook in the process of reforming the curricula thus representing an official voice, denounces the critique that the curriculum outcomes presuppose a normative and superficial learning about apartheid (see Chisholm 2004). While she argues that the curriculum profoundly focuses on developing critical and enquiring skills, she concludes that this view is not necessarily reflected in practice. Further doubts of how educators interpret the OBE emphasis on critical and reflexive thinking can be found in Carol Bertram's research

(2008). Bertram, who has looked at approaches towards History teaching in public High schools, has found that learners are mostly required to extract information rather than critically engaging with sources. Hence, Bertram's research from public schools shows tendencies of an uncritical approach towards teaching History. The gap between historically advantaged and disadvantaged schools in South Africa makes it extremely problematic to apply empirical findings from classrooms across the schooling system. The school in my case study is a well resourced private school located on one 'end of the extremes' which has further contributed to a difficulty in finding relevant previous research.

Narrowing the research perspective to how apartheid as a subject matter has been addressed in the classroom, the research has (exclusively) focused on the History subject. Since teachers' became key agents of both pedagogical and political change in post-apartheid South Africa, the research focus to a significant extent on teachers' attitudes towards apartheid in the classroom. Rob Siebörger and Sarah Dryden (2006) have studied the pedagogical role of teachers' personal stories in History education. Siebörger and Dryden suggest that the teacher testimonies are widely used to describe apartheid in both well resourced and under-resourced classrooms in South Africa. Teachers in Dryden and Siebörger's study were of the conviction that their own narratives would lead students to internalizing the collective values of reconciliation (ibid p. 400). While raising a warning that teachers' stories should not be presented uncritically as 'fact' or 'truth', Dryden and Siebörger argue that teacher narratives can be effective pedagogical tools that reach students on a personal level while at the same time shedding light on a wider context of historical time" (Dryden and Siebörger 2006:402).

Also focusing on History teachers' role in the educating learners about apartheid, Gail Weldon has found that teachers experience personal barrier towards teaching about apartheid. Weldon's research has concluded that the history teachers in South Africa feel pressured to become agents of change, while they struggle with personal experience of apartheid either as victims, beneficiaries and/or perpetrators (Weldon 2009:274). The curricular transition has proved problematic since most teachers are trained in a teacher education that emphasized values of separatism and racism. Weldon's argument relies on the fact that teachers of the apartheid generation from various academic backgrounds struggle to develop their own understanding of 'social justice' and 'reconciliation' in post-apartheid classrooms (Weldon 2009). At the same time they are supposed to teach

a value driven curricular that presupposes a deconstruction of these concepts and narratives. Since a conceptual understanding is necessary in the discussions that teaching apartheid requires, Weldon's research raises questions about where this leaves the students in their meeting with apartheid in the classroom. To my knowledge, no corresponding research has been carried out to examine how students perceive learning about apartheid. This is where my study picks up the trail.

In order to find research on student perceptions of discussing apartheid in an educational context applicable to my case study, I have looked at study on first year University students taking an English literature course (see McKinney 2004). While my study is concerned with the FET phase (Grade 10-12), the social and economical contexts are similar and the students' ages differ with approximately two years. Furthermore, McKinney's research is valuable to my study since it discusses how apartheid past surfaces in other forms than as a prescribed historical content within the framework of History education.

Looking at students' attitudes towards discussing apartheid in a predominantly affluent, 'white' University setting<sup>5</sup>, Carolyn McKinney (2004) has found that they feel a strong objection to deal with the apartheid past. Her students tend to place apartheid firmly in the past as something they are "done with" (ibid p. 164) The students in McKinney's research express a desire to "move on" and focus on the future, which McKinney interprets as a means to distance themselves from apartheid. At the same time they display an 'optimism' of being part of the new 'Rainbow nation'. The students argue that 'race' and 'skin-colour' do not matter – they do not even see it - suggestive of distancing themselves from a 'social stigma' associated with racism during apartheid (McKinney 2004). While the students see themselves as detached from apartheid, they are simultaneously aware of how the political, economical and social remains of apartheid impact their daily lives (ibid. p.166).

McKinney's result should be considered against the background of two parallel discourses that saturate South African society. Surveys on young people's attitudes towards living in South Africa indicate a strong sense of national pride (Boyce 2010). Boyce argues that this can be related to an official discourse of a 'new' unified South Africa. Media representations, sport images and corporate images are dominated by a

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<sup>5</sup> A first-year undergraduate English Studies course at a historically 'white' Afrikaner university in South Africa.

portrait of South Africa as a reconciled nation which has moved away from imposing identity on its citizens (Boyce 2010). Simultaneously, in statistic reports and in political, social and educational policies, a discourse based on the separation of different ‘races’<sup>6</sup> is still used to readdress the inequalities of apartheid (McKinney 2004,2007, Soudien 2004:95). Hence, controversial concepts associated with Apartheid such as ‘race’ and ‘reconciliation’ saturate public and private life in South Africa (McKinney 2007). Reserch on young people’s attitudes towards apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa provide useful framework factors that can be applied to my case study, in order to understand the meeting with apartheid in the classrom and what idactical challenges that can arise.

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<sup>6</sup> Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) uses the ‘racial’ categorization system of Black/African, Coloured, Asian and White to classify ‘race’. Crain Soudien has found that the new reform agenda of the government, which includes policies, social renewal and educationalist strategies, relies firmly on a discourse of ‘race’ (2004:95).

## 6. Method and Study Design

In this chapter I will give an account of the methodological considerations done prior and during my study. Since this essay seeks to explore how individual students' and teachers' perceive learning about apartheid, I have chosen a qualitative research strategy. A qualitative approach, according to Amos Hatch, seeks "to understand the world from the perspective of those living it" (Hatch 2002:7). In order to answer my research question I have carried a qualitative ethnographical study at two schools as a part of a Minor Field Study in the Cape Town area, South Africa. In my field study I have combined qualitative methods of collecting data, namely document analysis, participant observations and semi-structured interviews. Conducting research within a context and educational system foreign to the researcher requires time to adapt to the context (Bogdan and Knopp-Biklen 2007:93). To account for a more time-consuming research design, the data collecting phase of the study has been carried out during 10 weeks from October to December 2010.

### 6.1 Data Collection

Due to the unfamiliarity of my research field, I have conducted observation at H-school. According to Hatch, the advantage of observation as a method is that it permits for the researcher to gain a better contextual understanding (Hatch 2002:72). Since the researcher cannot observe everything that takes place in the classroom, it becomes essential to choose an observational focus. In line with the aim of this study, the focus of my observations was the student-to-student and teacher-to-student dialogue in the classroom when apartheid was discussed. In addition to developing an understanding of the school context, the observations generated questions for my teacher and student interviews. I have observed two separate History lessons with one Grade 11 class at H-school.

Since my study aims at capturing participant perspectives on apartheid teaching, the main source of data collection is through semi-structured interviews with students and

teachers. The advantage of semi-structured interviews Bogdan and Knopp-Biklen argues is that the open-ended question leaves space for the interviewer to be flexible and pursue new topics that emerge (2007:104).

I have conducted four qualitative group interviews with groups of 3 Grade 11 learners. I chose group interviews, rather than individual interviews, since I am interested in how the students discuss among themselves the experiences of learning about apartheid (Bogdan and Knopp-Biklen 2007:109). A quantitative method, for example questionnaires, could have been used to map student attitudes. However, during my initial observation I detected a superficial ‘politically correct’ discourse among students and teachers that I aimed to get beyond. Questionnaires would not have given me the opportunity to probe and follow up the student reasoning to the same extent as qualitative interviews.

Criticism of qualitative group interviews has concerned whether the group format makes subjects feel they can speak freely on a topic (Bogdan and Knopp-Biklen 2007:109). To avoid that subjects would feel inhibited to speak their minds the students choose the groups themselves. In my case, the support of friends made students feel more secure in the interview situation. This was crucial since my study deals with a potentially sensitive topic. When conducting research with learners in a school environment, Hatch argues that there is a risk that students will try to find the ‘right’ answer to a question, due to how they are socialized into the norms of the school (2002:102). In order to avoid this to the greatest extent possible, I have asked open-end questions structured around themes that would invite the informants to talk from their own perspective and experience (Hatch 2002:102). This methodological choice to let the student guide the interviews has meant that not all themes were covered in all interviews (Bogdan and Knopp-Biklen 2007). Furthermore, in order to create a good interview climate, a substantial part of each interview was designated to a ‘warm-up’ (for example we discussed their hobbies, dreams, and how they reason about their schools). The teachers have not been present during the student interviews.

In addition to the student interviews, I have conducted semi-structured interviews with one History teacher and one English teacher teaching the Grade 11 respondents. In the interviews I have been using an interview guide. The teachers’ voices have been included in this study to contrast the student replies in order to answer the research question regarding what a supposed discrepancy between perceptions can result in.

To strengthen the validity of my results I have chosen to present representative examples from my empirical findings together with a detailed interpretation in order to make my reasoning transparent to the reader. In the final stages of my field study I meet up with a researcher familiar with the field and staff at, and associated with, the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation in order to discuss my findings and further strengthen the validity of the study which is suggested by Bryman (2001:257).

## 6.2 Ethical Considerations

According to Steinar Kvale in *Interviews – Learning the Crafts of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (2009) using interviews as a method requires careful ethical considerations throughout the research process. Following Kvale's ethical considerations all of the participants in this study have given their informed consent. The anonymity has been assured to protect the integrity of the informants (Kvale 2009:73). The information about the schools', students' and teachers' backgrounds included has been done so only after carefully being weighed against giving the reader an insight into the South African educational context.

Using interviews as a method requires that the researcher considers his/her own role in relation to the research topic and the informants (Kvale 2009:74, Bogdan and Knopp-Biklen 2007). In this study the ethical dilemma has occurred when I have experienced value-conflicts with the informants, mostly over 'racist comments'. Since these conflicts have been minor I have held back on my own opinions to the advantage of letting the informer elaborate on their perspective (Bogdan and Knopp-Biklen 2007:109). This has been necessary, especially in the student group interviews, to get beyond the 'superficial' discourse.

In accordance with MFS praxis, I will report back my findings to the relevant actors in the field (namely the school involved, my field supervisor and the South African researchers that have assisted me throughout my research process).

## 6.3 Sample

The choice of studying South Africa was motivated by my interest to see how a conflict can be taught in a post-conflict society. This interest springs an academic background

within both the field of Peace Studies and Education. My sample derives from what Cohen refers to as *snowball sampling*, meaning that they were chosen on recommendations from an ‘expert’ in the field working for the educational Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that I was initially associated with (Cohen mfl 2007:104). This method is suggested when access is difficult because it is a ‘sensitive topic’ or where the researcher’s network is limited which has been the case in my study.

H-school is a private girls’ school located in the wealthy suburb in Cape Town. The annual fee is R10,000 for grade 1-9 (R5,000 for Grade 12). The students are all girls and come from predominantly affluent families. There students who attend the school would have been classified as ‘black’, ‘Asian’ and ‘coloured’, with a dominance of ‘white’ students. In 2009 the pass rate for grade 12 was 100%. Rather than a typical case-sampling, where the schools are considered to represent the ‘average’ school (see Cohen mfl.2005:144), the choice of H-school be seen as politically interesting as representing one extreme end of the wide spectrum that South African schooling constitutes.

I have applied an inclusive approach where all the students in the Grade 11 History class who wanted to participate were included (Hatch 2002). In total 4 interviews with groups of 3 students (12 respondents in sum) were conducted at H-school. The interviews ranged from 35-60 minutes. In the teacher interviews the class’s teacher in English and History were chosen. The interviews were 45 and 90 minutes. All the interviews have been recorded and transcribed.

# 7. Results

In this chapter I will present the results from the data collected through observations and interviews. In line with the purpose of this essay I will reflect on how teachers (of History and English) and their learners relate to the meeting with apartheid in the classroom, and highlight key themes that will constitute the foundation for my analysis.

## 7.1.1 Observations

I have observed two History lessons on separate occasions. The student group consists of 16 Grade 11 learners. The girls are seated in groups of 4-5 students around round tables. The history classroom is full of posters referring to the anti-apartheid movement, the freedom movement and transition towards democracy.

*First observation* The teacher presents me and I sit with the girls around one of the tables observing and taking notes. The focus of my observation is the teacher and student interaction. The topic of the lesson is “Aftermaths of war” where they discuss reconciliation among other things. The teacher leads the discussion and encourages the students to speak freely on what they remember from a previous lecture held on the topic. A group of about 6 girls are very talkative and eagerly answers the teacher’s questions. From time to time the students are interrupted when they start talking about their own examples from their life about their family members and reconciliation. The discussion is led ‘back on track’ by the teacher by not following up the students stories. The teacher’s own experiences and emotions dominate the examples.

The *second observation* is another 40 minutes lesson spent on whole class discussion on education and indoctrination during apartheid. The students share stories about how their parents were indoctrinated in school. The teacher makes parallels to their situation and asks: “should we teach about apartheid?” All of the students answer “yes” in unison. The teacher asks why they should: “it is a big part of our history”, “to help us prevent it”. The answers come fast and correspond to the official narrative of the reconciliation process. The conversation is lead to how apartheid education separated

according to 'racial' hierarchies. The teacher asks what 'race' means? The students don't answer for a long while. This is the first time the students are quiet. They sit rather uncomfortably in their seats. The question is still hanging in the air when the bell rings.

### 7.1.2 Reflection on the Observations

The observation provided me with an understanding of the classroom environment when the class was discussing a topic in which connections to apartheid were made. Since I was new to the learners my presence likely affected the classroom dynamics. Though I had expected the students to hold back as a result of my presence, what initially caught my attention was how talkative and outspoken they were. I interpret this as a desire to come off as 'good students'. Furthermore, this gives an idea of the norms in the classroom that a 'good student' contributes to the discussion and expresses opinions.

The students were encouraged by the teacher to structure their own argument and to give feedback to each other. The observations showed me that little argumentation took place between the students, however they often confirmed each others' argument. The students participating in the discussions were limited to a few in both cases. In both lessons the teacher was the intended recipient of the students' communication. Interaction learner-to-learner was most intense when the learners shared stories about their own families and experiences. The teacher's personal stories and experience of Apartheid surfaced in both lessons but the students did not raise questions about these.

The overall impression of the classroom discussions was that the students were eager to confirm a positive understanding of the lessons learned from apartheid. Despite the teacher's provoking questions the students sought to find a 'right' answer to the questions that appeared to be open-ended. This raised questions about what I could not see from my observations, namely how the students perceive the meeting with apartheid in the classroom and what themes, questions and emotions it raises. Hence, the observations were important to me both to form guiding questions for the interviews and to more accurately interpret the student and teacher interviews that follow.

## 7.2 Teacher Interviews

The attitudes and experience put forward in the interviews will now be outlined as a step towards answering my research question. The results from the interviews will be structured around three themes: experiences of a *normative/superficial approach*, *resistance and relevance*, and *classroom dialogue*.

### 7.2.1 Experiences of a Normative/Superficial Approach

In both the interviews with the History teacher and the English teacher they describe that they experience the meeting with apartheid in the classroom as political and sensitive. The History teacher describes a personal conviction that apartheid ought to be dealt with in all subjects. She recognizes and appreciates the democratic ambition of the curricula and she experiences it as being geared towards promoting the official version of the post-apartheid transition towards democracy (Interview History Teacher 2010). This has made her question whether the area of the transition towards democracy including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission should be graded in the MATRIC<sup>7</sup> exams (that are assessed externally):

You can't ask a questions about 'How did the TRC lead to reconciliation and to bring justice to the victims?' when it is so soon. The process is still ongoing and we all have very personal apprehensions on what justice is (Interview History Teacher 2010).

The exam question presupposes that the TRC did in fact lead to reconciliation, something which the teacher does not necessarily agree with. Rather than criticizing and questioning the TRC process, the students are supposed to embrace the path that South Africa chose post-apartheid in her understanding, which she experiences complicates how apartheid is approached.

In the interview with the English teacher she indicates a dilemma between feeling restrained by parents and by a desire among the student to be 'politically correct' that limits the space for critical dialogue about concepts and narratives relating to apartheid:

You are restricted about the fact that if the child complains about you and say that you said something in class they go back to their parents... there is only a certain degree of honesty that you could go to" (Interview English Teacher 2010) .

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<sup>7</sup> Matriculation (or MATRIC) referring to the qualification received on graduating from high school

The English teacher rather suggests that these themes that arise, such as ‘race’ and ‘stereotyping’, should be dealt with in History. The advantages of discussing questions and themes that arise as consequences of apartheid in history is that you can put it “further away” in the disguise of a historical context, or of another country, to escape the awkwardness and the critical eyes of the parents (Interview English Teacher 2010). This strategy, in the understanding of the English teacher, will not make the students feel exposed or victimized. She contemplates over the pros and cons of this tactic: ”I guess the bad thing is that you don’t address things properly, while the good thing is that we become more sensitive to where everyone is coming from, and that will promote harmony” (Interview English Teacher 2010).

### 7.2.2 Experience of Resistance and Relevance

A problem that both teachers bring up in the interviews is that their learners, who have grown up post-Apartheid, lack motivation towards learning about apartheid. The history teacher finds that “they often don’t want to discuss apartheid cause they say that we have nothing to do with it”. She experiences that the students bring this “with them from home where their parents say ‘let’s go on with it, let’s move on’ it is part of the past, we can’t be stuck in these things...they did not benefit from apartheid we often hear” (Interview History Teacher 2010).

A challenge the History teacher experience is to make apartheid relevant and less ‘threatening’ to the students. A method she uses is to approach apartheid discussions by introducing short stories from other countries with a history of racial segregation/conflict (such as Nazi Germany). According to the history teacher, this strategy allows her to look at broader themes such as for example by-standing behavior. The advantages of these methods she concludes is that “there is some kind of process that happens more naturally than turning it the other way around... then it is less resistance” (Interview History Teacher 2010). When not feeling ‘threatened’, she experiences that her students are more likely to draw parallels to their everyday lives.

Similarly to the history teacher the English teacher experiences a resistance among her students to deal with apartheid. She finds that her students have trouble relating to the text she finds relevant to discuss in relation to apartheid:

[A] lot of the girls don't relate to that because they are of an age where they have grown up in post 1994, [...] I've had them in a classroom and taught a poem, and I'm thinking "gosh, this got a great deal of a meaning, you know, we can't go back to what was in the past" and they go "oh, I'm so over apartheid, I'm sick of apartheid (Interview English Teacher 2010)

The English teacher actively chose texts dealing with apartheid resistance and struggle since she feels it is her moral obligation to deal with the subject matter. The English teacher feels that there "is a separation between the staff [and the students] because we remember things" (Interview English Teacher 2010). She appears to be frustrated about the gap between the students and herself when it comes to what is relevant to discuss in relation to apartheid. This has resulted that her personal experiences are important to her when she teaches apartheid to bridge this gap. When meeting apartheid in the classroom she experiences a need to position herself morally to the content and pass on her values to the students: "when I'm dealing with a poem, I say that I had a privileged background carried on the black who were the cheap labor...I tell the girls that they have a great social responsibility". At the same time she is aware that it is a bit "drummed into them" which she refers to as a H-consciousness that saturates the school climate.

### 7.2.3 Experiences of Classroom Dialogue

In my interview with the history teacher she finds that the students actively participate in the classroom interaction when discussing apartheid. She describes that she has worked hard with developing a safe group that take great pleasure in developing their own opinions and argument. She describes a respectful classroom climate as the most important condition for facilitating students' learning:

So we do a lot of brainstorming and just putting the ideas up there in a non-threatening way...you know everyone has a point of view, and there must also be respect to listen, not to criticize (Interview History Teacher 2010).

The history teacher concludes that apartheid, as meet in discussions of reconciliation, equity and social justice, is a controversial subject to discuss in South Africa because of the often extreme opinions that arise in these discussions. To the history teacher, questions of tolerance and social justice must be dealt with because they are a part of the reality that students will face in the future workplace. Her emphasis on the classroom as a 'safe space' where all opinions are allowed put in contrast to how levels of extremism

that she experience occur in society suggest that her approach is rather to deal with uncomfortable and undemocratic opinions than to avoid them. In the light of how she emphasizes 'trust' and open-mindedness in the classroom discussions, she indicates a challenge to move beyond a superficial discussion on apartheid as seen in the observations, since an official narrative of apartheid appears very dominant.

In the interview with the English teacher, she experiences when discussing stories dealing with apartheid in class, the students often censor each other: "If you get into a discussion and someone says something that gets a little too close to the bone the other girls go *"AH! YOU CAN'T SAY THAT"*" (Interview English Teacher 2010). According to the English teacher, the meeting with apartheid occurs in many contemporary texts and it concerns her that these "new texts are not necessarily about reconciliation":

We have a new system, we have a new government, but the past is still there, but now it's black people trying to be white, or white people now faulting black people cause they feel there is a new middle class – it's a different kind of prejudice that is sometimes too sensitive to deal with cause you got mixed classes<sup>8</sup> (Interview English Teacher 2010).

To the English teacher, the questions of skin color, identity and readdressing the structural legacy are part of the meeting with apartheid in her classes. However, these contemporary themes associated with apartheid she experiences as much more sensitive than to discuss apartheid in a historical context. The complexities of catering for a more diverse group seems to put restraints towards classroom interaction when discussing apartheid. These questions that arise are not something she actively decides to engage with/have as a theme. Her approach is rather to allow it to spontaneously surface in literary discussions. In her experience, the students refrain from discussing concepts such as 'race', identity and stereotyping, in class "because of the p.c-ness<sup>9</sup>" but once she "talk[s] to them one on one" the students bring up these issues (Interview English Teacher 2010).

#### 7.2.4 Reflections on the Teacher Results

In my teacher interviews I have found that both the History teacher and the English teacher experience apartheid as something that they frequently encounter and deal with in their subjects. Both teachers find that when apartheid is dealt with they encounter

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<sup>8</sup> As opposed to previously when H-school exclusively catered for 'white' learners.

<sup>9</sup> Political correctness

resistance among the students and they experience that their learners have problems relating to apartheid. They understand the resistance as a part of the political sensitivity of the topic and how it is connoted with a great social responsibility on behalf of the students who mostly come from the groups that benefited from apartheid. In addition, the teachers understand that this resistance is a product from the student's home environment. The strategy of approaching apartheid from another country's angle is offered by both teachers as a method to avoid initial resistance and open up a space for the students to reflect on the broader issues relating to apartheid.

At H-school the teachers take the NCS mission to 'imbue' the values of equality and redress very seriously, which has resulted in what they refer to as a 'H-conscious'. However, the sense of shame and blame in relation to apartheid history has put especial restraints on the classroom climate in the experience of both teachers. Coupled with a pressure from the outside, both from parents and from the educational authorities, it has resulted in that both teachers experience a challenge to engage in deep learning that exceeds a superficial or normative understanding of apartheid. On the one hand, the History teacher suggests a more out-front and open dialogue on Apartheid where all opinions should be voiced, while the English teacher's favors a more indirect approach.

I have now given an account of how the teachers experience the meeting with Apartheid in the classroom. I will now move on to display the results of my student interviews.

## 7.3 Students Interviews

### 7.3.1 Experiences of a Normative/Superficial Approach

In all of my student group-interviews I found that the learners initially express a positive attitude and pride of learning about apartheid. One student reasons that "I think it is very important for us to, as we try to embrace this new rainbow nation 16 years later, [that] we should actually try getting a more positive image to the rest of the world" (Student 9). Another student expresses how the segregation of apartheid past today has turned into something positive:

I like learning about it, it makes me so proud that we have come so far from it [other girls agreeing]. That in 16 years, so much has changed, so you can imagine when we are in our 20 s or 50s what South Africa is going to be like (Student 10).

The pride is related to how far the young generation has come since the fall of Apartheid, thus marking a generational gap between them and the generation that lived and worked during Apartheid. To further distance themselves from apartheid ideology, many of the learners conclude that the young generations do not see ‘differences’ (as opposed to the older generation):

Nowadays there is so a emphasis on the fact ‘there is no differentiation between different races, different religions, different colors of skin,...ok obviously, religion is different... but for races especially, I mean ...we always been told in schools, because we were never around or were old enough to know separation. [...]. We were just born into not making it a difference (Student 3).

The students’ reasoning indicates that acknowledging differences between groups is to associate with an Apartheid separationist ideology. In her understanding, the school has taught them to downplay difference in a general sense to the advantage of promoting a unified South Africa. The same tendencies to take pride in distance themselves from concepts associated with Apartheid can be found when the students discuss ‘race’. ‘Race’ or ‘skin colour’ are described as irrelevant to the students, they do not even ‘see it’ (Student 3).

What (arguably) is intended from the teachers’ side to underpin the equal value and rights of all: “*all born different but equal in value*”, appears to be understood by the learners that there is no difference between individuals *per se*; we are all equal with and born with equal preconditions. An attempt to pass on the values of the curricula, seems to induce unwillingness among the student to distinguish differences in society at all, thereof the description of blind to ‘color’ and ‘difference’.

### 7.3.2 Experiences of Resistance and Relevance

When the interviews progress and the atmosphere is more relaxed, the students in all groups become more nuanced in their descriptions of how they experience the meeting with apartheid in the classroom. A similar pattern occurred in all four groups. In group 1 the students experience the meeting with Apartheid as something that rather contributes to antagonism and separation:

Student 1: I don't think apartheid should be taught to such an extent. We keep being made aware of what happened to 'them' and what happened to 'us', and it is always 'us' and 'them'.

Student 2: "I agree, in a sense...but that is like saying people in Germany should not learn about the Holocaust."

Student: 1 "Yeah, I know...and that's not—ahh! [sighs loudly] (Interview Student Group 1)

While student 2 makes connection to a wider historical and moral context, student 1 struggles with how learning about apartheid can promote a unified South Africa. The interview extract should be considered in the light of how the students associate 'seeing difference' with apartheid ideology. The students' discussion suggest that she rather experience learning about Apartheid as simplified 'withes' against 'black' than critically deconstructing and reflecting over the conflict dynamics. She continues to describe her dilemma:

It is like when do you stop talking about apartheid?[...] Like I know that we *must*, and I do enjoy learning about it..if we don't obviously for especially persons of colour they would be brought down a lot...and...'but it is too much this is what happened to your parents and this is why you have to be grateful and type of thing' (Student 2)

In group 2 the students describe how they experience a tiredness of how the apartheid theme reoccurs. "I find that none actually wants to learn about apartheid, every time Ms X says that we are going to talk about it the whole class sigh" (Student 4). The students are frustrated that there is nothing 'new' when they learn about apartheid: "It is so boring because it is like...what we are doing now is exactly the same as we did in grade 7 (Student 4). All this "talk about apartheid" she says has resulted in that: "We have been desensitized to apartheid" (Student 5). In group three the students experience dealing with Apartheid is "so broad and generalized. We don't only want to know about Nelson Mandela and Steven Biko, they were important but sometimes it is like those where the only ones" (Student 7). She continues: "You get a very superficial feel. People died. People were unhappy. Things went wrong. That is kind of where it ends".

The student in group 3 "find that when [the teachers] teach apartheid it is an extremely sensitive subject as it only happened so recently, 16 years ago, so people are still, it is still fresh in peoples mind"(Student 8). As a result of how recent it was, she experiences that the teachers find it hard to teach. When she concludes that: "there's a lot of things about apartheid that you have to find out on your own, that they won't

teach here” it suggests that the students experience a resistance among the teachers to deal with apartheid thoroughly and critically. The discussion above raises questions of what a superficial approach towards Apartheid (as the students understand it), effects how they perceive the relevance of learning about apartheid. The students reason about the connections between apartheid as taught in school and their everyday lives, that “it concerns us, but is not really relevant to us” (Student 1). Since they experience that “live such sheltered lives, [they] can’t relate to” how apartheid is taught at H-school (Student 3).

What the students do perceive as relevant in their situation is how apartheid surfaces through policies that aim to readdress the structural inequalities remaining in South Africa<sup>10</sup>. In that sense, apartheid surfaces in their everyday life and raises new questions and subjects for discussion, such as identity issues, segregation, equity and equality. In all groups, lively discussions take place and they express in this context a need to learn more about apartheid. What I understand as a lack of relatable context when discussing apartheid as many of the learners describe a discrepancy of what the school teaches them and how the world around them looks. One girl exemplifies her confusion over the quoting system based on ‘racial’-categorization: “it sort of seems contradictory to what we always say, ‘it’s all about being equal, it doesn’t matter the colour of your skin’ and now in sport it does, its reversed, it just doesn’t make sense”(Student 2). While the school teaches them, in their understanding to “disregard from skin colour” as a lesson learned from apartheid past, this understanding is inadequate to interpret the society around them where ‘race’ is used as a means of classification. What troubles the girls is that in their school context of a growing ‘black’ middle class, ‘colour of skin’ does not necessarily correspond with a certain economic situation. They appear not to have learned the tools to problemize the concept of ‘race’ and the historical and political meaning associated with the concept post-apartheid.

### 7.3.3 Experiences of Classroom Dialogue

In the light of how apartheid relates to themes that have cross curricular links, such as structural redress, identity construction amongst other, the question of how the learners experience that they can discuss the themes they experience most pressing in class thus

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<sup>10</sup> Quoting systems based on racial categorization are used in many areas, for example to learners at H-school this is exemplified in University applications and when qualifying for national sport teams.

becomes a focal point. In three of my four group interviews I find that the students experience apartheid as a topic which is generally very sensitive to discuss. Student 4 concludes that [t]here is defiantly a lot of tension underlying which we don't talk about, that we don't address". In group three, where the student refers to herself as being "as mixed race (Student 7)" the following episode illustrates the tension of discussing apartheid:

Student 8 : "Even when we talk about [apartheid] in class sometimes, it is such a sensitive issue and I feel, oh even now when you are looking at me [refers to S7] I feel a little like 'oh, I shouldn't say that',....[laughs nervously] it is so tender...

Student 7: "Yeah, it is such a sensitive subject and I feel that sometimes people get very uncomfortable[...] people feel like they don't want to give their opinion of how they feel about apartheid, and how they truly feel, and honestly I wanna hear what other people feel. [...] it is still too early to say that we are all happy now—together—it looks like that on paper, but in reality we are not that unified."  
(Interviews Group Student 3 2010).

While Student 7 experiences the meeting with apartheid controversial in the context of H-school as a predominantly 'white' school, she expresses a need to talk about apartheid more openly. It appears frustrating to her that both teachers and students avoid speaking freely on the topic in fear of being associated with perpetrators/advocators. Overall the students in the interviews express how a 'political correctness' is frustrating and prevents them for having 'authentic' discussions -"it is like stepping stones really" and she just want[s] them to stop" (Student 7).

Especially sensitive is the connection between apartheid, 'race', identity and economical differences. As student 2 concludes they are "taboo topics" at H-school - and "[they] don't go there" (Student 2). Yet, the underlying tension she experiences as bound to surface in heated discussions both within the classroom and during extracurricular activities. She gives an example of how debates on current topics at the schools debating club have several times turned out in "racial debates" which scares her (Student 3). While the students seem to lack an understanding of concepts relevant to discuss apartheid both within and outside the school context, the description of the classroom climate raises question to which extent it allows for an open dialogue on these concepts.

## 7.4 Reflections on the Students Results

I have found in my interviews with the students divergent attitudes towards learning about apartheid. Many of the students express that they are ‘proud’ to learn about apartheid since it makes them feel that they have come a long way since 1994. I have found that the students experience a need to distance themselves from apartheid by arguing that they do not see difference. The students initial positive attitudes and pride towards learning about Apartheid shows that the socialization of these values dominate the school culture. When the students later question these attitudes it raises doubt regarding what type of learning on apartheid that is valued.

The students furthermore describe that they experience apartheid as being dealt with superficially and normatively resulting from, in their interpretation, a syllabus focusing on national heroes and generalized content. In the students’ experience, what the school teaches them does not add up with their understanding of the world around them. As a response, the students find that meeting with Apartheid as distant and lacking relevance in their lives. It is noteworthy that a normative approach towards apartheid appears to be favored in the H-school case since a questioning of narratives and concepts does not coincide with the students perceptions of a unified South Africa.

While the students express a desire to engage in a more open dialogue that will enhance their learning about apartheid past and present, they experience that the political sensitivity of the question hinders them to discuss concepts and narratives of apartheid critically.

## 8. Analysis

I will now analyze the results from my teacher and student interviews by using a socio-cultural perspective on learning. The analysis is structured around the didactical challenges that the three themes outlined in my results propose; *a normative approach*, *resistance and relevance* and *classroom dialogue*. This disposition does not imply that the themes should be seen as independent of one another. On the contrary, they should be considered as integral parts of the learning process which my analysis will show.

### 8.1 Didactical Challenges of Normative Approach

H-school has a 100 percent pass rate within the MATRIC. This should imply that the students have developed reflective and critical skills that they demonstrate by deconstructing and reflecting over apartheid narratives. According to Harley and Wederkind (2004), the affluent H-school would have benefitted from the curricular reform, as it has access to comparatively vast resources and well trained educators. In spite of this, the students still find that the teaching about apartheid does not enhance deep learning. Since learning must progress to be perceived as meaningful, a normative/superficial approach towards apartheid will add to the students' lack of motivation (Dysthe 2001). This echoes the discussions on the normative implementation of the curricula brought up in Chisholm (2004), Weldon (2009) and Bertram (2008).

The teachers' moral struggle with their own role during apartheid, as suggested by Weldon (2009), and exemplified at H-school by the English teacher, has resulted in a 'too rigid' attitude to the way that cultural and ethical values associated with apartheid are mediated and discussed. From a socio-cultural perspective, a pretension at H-school to implement the ethical values of the curriculum is experienced to suppress authentic discussions on apartheid, which in turn will result in superficial learning (Dysthe 1995). In the H-case when concepts of 'difference' and 'race' are downplayed to promote politically correct understanding of a society that has officially left segregation behind, the students find it difficult to integrate this information with their experiences of the

world around them. Consequently, an approach towards apartheid that fails to account for complexions of contemporary South Africa does not promote the critical and reflexive learning envisaged by the curricula. In addition, it raises doubt whether the students will construct their own understanding of values such as equality, equity and social responsibility, in contexts outside school if they have not been allowed to internalize these values based on their own conviction.

The history teacher's approach differs in this matter, she too has felt urged to deal with apartheid normatively which suggests the difficulties in implementing policy in practice. While she finds support in the outcome based curricula, the biggest challenge in the H-case is constituted by the resistance among her students and the uni-voiced classroom dialogue, which I will now discuss more closely.

## 8.2 Didactical Challenges of Resistance and Relevance

Since a socio-cultural perspective underlines the importance of relating what is taught to the students own experiences of the world, the didactical challenge thus lies within the presupposition that the students are resentful to make connections between what is taught in relation to apartheid and their experiences of the world around them (Dysthe 1995, Säljö 2000, Dewey in Vaage 2001). The students in my interviews show similar attitudes of pride, resistance, and distance as the students in McKinney's research (2004). The resistance among the students can be interpreted as a result of political sensitivity concerning apartheid as suggested by McKinney (2004) and favored by the teachers in my study. While my results show that the teachers focus on students resentment as a product from their homes, the result from the student interviews suggest that the didactical dilemma has further dimensions as they claim it to be more a question of how relevant and learner centered the teaching is perceived to be.

The students' resistance is dealt with differently by the two teachers interviewed. At H-school the teachers' own stories and experiences, in my study exemplified by the English teacher, do not necessarily constitute powerful pedagogic tools, as suggested by Dryden and Siebörger (2006). When, according to Dysthe (1995), the teacher's perspective becomes too dominant the students find it difficult to relate to the subject matter. Instead of providing the students with relatable stories about apartheid, they drown the students' voices in the discussions on apartheid. Firstly, this might be caused

by the fact that a constructive and open debate on the past and present can lead to confrontation with the personas taken by the teachers themselves during the apartheid era. In order to allow for the students to reflect on apartheid, teachers need to keep a professional distance where the dialogue does not only involve personal confessions and reflections.

Secondly, the central position of the teachers' firsthand experience risks enhancing the gap between teacher and the learner. Students rarely reach the same level of understanding as the teacher, not only because of the teacher's expertise knowledge in their subject, but also due to the fact that he or she has firsthand experience of the former political system. In order to minimize the gap between students and teachers, learner centered content and ditto perspectives will be required. In order for the students to engage as active agents in authentic sense making talks, the teachers must put the students' questions, themes and experience in the foreground. If this does not occur, which my reflections of the observations suggest, the peer perspective is blurred and students accordingly no longer function as catalysts in their own learning (Dysthe1995,2001, Säljö 2000). In the case of H-school, I argue that this can explain part of the students' lack of motivation towards learning about apartheid.

The History teacher's method of using narratives from other countries with similar political traumas is described by Dysthe as a way to structure the subject matter so that the students can make their own realizations and conceptual models (1995:247). In contexts less associated with individual emotions obstructing the learning process, the students are allowed to try out their arguments, draw conclusions and construct their own conceptual understanding. Consequently, it will provide a fruitful environment to develop skills such as critical thinking and ability to see connections and draw conclusions. The latter, Dysthe points out, can then be transferred as cognitive tools in more complex or sensitive contexts. Consequently, the history teacher's conscious method of addressing the issues of apartheid in an enveloped way rather than 'head on' can be an efficient strategy to avoid the resistance the students display.

On the other hand, the students' attitudes and experiences of the meeting with apartheid indicate that they experience this approach differently. They claim that teaching on apartheid is irrelevant because they feel isolated, both contextually and mentally, since they do not relate to the content provided by the teachers. They find it difficult relating foreign and outdated narratives to their own situations. This lack of relevance in the learning experience is not an unexpected result from a socio-cultural

perspective that presupposes that learning and knowledge are contextualized (Vaage 2001). In the case of H-school, discussions on apartheid must be cultivated in contexts that the students are familiar with and in which they later can develop and apply the skills envisaged in the curricula.

Meta-cognitive skills and values are not independent of the context in which they are learned. Hence the skills must therefore be developed in close relation to the context in which it should be applied (Dewey 1938, Vaage 2001). If issues of apartheid are discussed in too metaphorical terms, this further complicates for the learners to critically reflect over, yet understand, the complex structures of contemporary South Africa. Especially since there is a gap between the official discourse and government practice as described by Boyce (2010) and Soudien (2006). To the students in my study, issues such as tolerance, national identity, racism and structural redress, are their personal narratives of apartheid. This indicates that there is not only a need, but several possible entries to discuss apartheid across the curricula. Coupled with a normative/superficial approach towards the content, the discrepancy between what the learners are taught in school and how they understand the world around them further adds to a lack of what is perceived as relevant. This echoes the critic towards de-contextualised institutionalized learning that Dewey presented more than 80 years ago and which the NSC seeks to avoid (Dewey 1938, see also Chisholm 2004).

To summarize, there appears to be a significant differences between the needs of the apartheid generation and the needs of the Rainbow generation when in search for a starting point of the debate. While it emerges in the teacher interviews that apartheid is too sensitive to discuss in a direct way, it is, on the other hand, apparent from the student interviews that there is a demand for more sincerity and more penetrating analysis in general. As envisaged in the NCS and in accordance with a socio-cultural approach, the need of the learner must be in focus –a conception that appears to be threatened by the strong emotional connection to apartheid that the teacher experience (Weldon 2009).

### 8.3 Didactical Challenges in the Classroom Dialogue

As my results have shown, the students' voices are heard in the discussions of apartheid, but when only an official narrative is confirmed. Critical voices are self-

censored because of the classroom climate. It is a question of reproduction rather than construction of new knowledge and insights (Dysthe 1995). However, the interaction between students in the interviews showed examples of different understandings within a group. In these informal contexts students could allow themselves to be less 'politically correct'. Such discourses offer valuable teaching moments during which conflicts of opinions create space for the learners. The dialogues with their peers deepen their understanding of apartheid. This can be said to exemplify Dysthe's (1995) idea that the conflict between divergent opinions can constitute a space for the learners to develop their argument and reach new insights.

When using a socio-cultural perspective as a benchmark, it is clear that the quality of the interaction is vital to learning (Dysthe 1995). An adaption of this idea is the History teacher's reoccurring emphasis on treating apartheid in an unthreatening teaching atmosphere. The history teacher is aiming at creating a multi-voiced environment in which the students feel that they can develop their own arguments together with their peers. However, the main obstacle appears to be how the topic of apartheid connotes with racist and separationist ideologies, which McKinney's research has suggested (2004).

Concepts such as 'race', 'reconciliation' and 'identity' are crucial when discussing modern South Africa. Students must therefore not be deprived from texts (and contexts) that can help them forming their own conceptual understanding since language is a key tool in the knowledge construction process (Säljö 2000). For the teachers these concepts may have implications which they would rather not deal with. The exception in my study is the History teacher who makes valiant attempts in her own class. However, since the other teachers keep avoiding these issues, holistic understanding of concepts connoting with apartheid, such as 'race' and 'identity' is obstructed and can on the contrary contribute to a social stigma and self-censorship that silences the multi-voiced dialogue (Dysthe 1995).

In conclusion, as my analysis has shown the experienced resistance, superficial learning and impositions of the classroom dialogue are intrinsically linked. It cannot be emphasized enough that the teacher's role is to develop citizens adhering to democratic values, especially in a society that is still characterized by racial conflicts. Essentially, at H-school this boils down to a question of creating a safe space that allows for authentic discussions which in turn challenge the students to develop more complex ways of reasoning. In this respect, my study at H-school indicates that the complexity of

implementing a political ideal in the curriculum can prove difficult irrespective of resources the school in question can access. More importantly, it comes down to the attitude and pedagogical approach of the teacher collective.

## 9. Conclusion

This study has allowed for a number of voices that are seldom heard on the topic of learning about apartheid to be voiced; those of the students. The results of this study have shown that there are gaps between how the teachers of the apartheid generation and the students of the 'Rainbow nation' perceive apartheid as relevant and relatable and how a silencing classroom climate limits the space for interaction on the subject matter. Hence, this study can be seen as a contribution to the wider debate of the challenges that face South African educational system post-apartheid.

Since my study is concerned with one end of the vast socio-economic spectrum that South Africa's schooling system caters for, the findings of this study should be considered within this context. It would be of further interest to extend the research to include schools with different socio-economic preconditions or historical backgrounds to examine whether relatable issues are raised to discuss a gap, not only between generations, but within.

Lastly, let us reflect on the quote that opened this essay. In relation to apartheid, as in any situation in a post conflict society, each generation that comes after will have their own struggles and issues. South African teachers carry the personal legacy of apartheid with them, and this will be the case for generations to come. An education that prepares students for the future requires that these issues are taken seriously. The didactical questions of what, how and why and thus requires extra consideration. In this aspect, dedicated teachers at H-school and their students' reactions to their teaching can offer valuable insight for further discussions on teaching about conflicts in a post-conflict society.

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