ORIGINAL PAPER

Encouraging Intercultural Communication Using an Action Research Approach

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Abstract South Africa is 15 years into democracy, but difficult dialogues about race, ethnicity, and other cultural differences are hindered when students are developmentally unprepared to handle them. Although institutions of learning have been painfully aware of the racial, cultural and ethnic divides on their campuses, no real strategies or policies have been put into place to ensure integration. This study started with problems that my colleagues in the Faculty of Science at a university in South Africa were experiencing with the lack of interaction and communication among the first year students in their large and diverse classrooms. They were also concerned that their students did not know how to deal with diversity and they wanted to graduate students who would be successful in their professional careers in a multicultural environment. This study found that using an action research approach was particularly successful in teaching Communication and in encouraging intercultural communication as lessons learned could be built upon or learned from in order to plan the next phase of intervention. The continual interactions during the various phases typical of the action research approach used, enabled the unearthing of feelings, problems and issues which would otherwise not have surfaced in the normal classroom where students are merely lectured. By transforming method and methodology, students and educators were exposed to new and different ways of being. This paper therefore reports on how a course in Communication was developed to facilitate communication and interaction between the different cultures and race groups in a Science classroom using an action research approach.

Keywords Communication · Culture · Diversity · Group work · Inclusion · Intercultural communication

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Introduction

In post apartheid South Africa institutions of learning have rapidly become melting pots of diverse cultures and languages as universities continue to attract a rich mix of racially and culturally diverse students (du Plessis and Bisschoff 2007, p. 245). One has to bear in mind that these students and their educators with their different languages and dialects each come with their own educational, social, historical and economic backgrounds adding to the diversity in the classroom. Students and educators therefore find themselves in classrooms that are very diverse in terms of culture, language, race and background. Makoe (2006, p. 374) adds that these students also have "to negotiate the disposition they acquired from family and community with the new dispositions that they are supposed to acquire as higher education students". Post-apartheid education in South Africa sees educators who often do not want to acknowledge differences in their students as they believe that it is discriminatory to do so (see Nieto 1996). But, Moletsane (1999) and Jansen (2004) agree that this "colour-blind" approach by teachers does not promote the interests of multiculturalism and that it has "direct consequences for students, identity and transformation" (Jansen 2004, p. 118). As Pettigrew and Tropp (2000) cautioned, simply bringing different racial and cultural groups into contact may generate more heat than light while Bennett and Bennett (2004) maintain that depending on the readiness of our students, our well-structured curriculum may fail to produce constructive interaction, much less the commitment to social justice that we have designed it to produce. Difficult dialogues about race, ethnicity, and other cultural differences are hindered when students are developmentally unprepared to handle them. But, although institutions of learning have been painfully aware of the racial, cultural and ethnic divides on their campuses, no real strategies or policies have been put into place to ensure integration. With people always trying to be politically correct, issues of race, culture and diversity are not openly declared or discussed. People are just expected to get along. A survey conducted among undergraduate students at a tertiary institution in South Africa found that students were unhappy with "*the manner in which the institution deals with the whole issue of diversity*". They expressed concern that there are "*no programs in place to help us to get along with each other*". This survey was prompted by my experience in a multicultural and multilingual learning environment where students were very reluctant to work with each other and in many instances even refused to associate with or talk to each other. Students felt that they did not "*know enough about each other*" or that there "*was no need to talk*" to people from different cultural or racial groups as "*we have our own friends*".

This study started with problems that my colleagues in the Faculty of Science were experiencing with the lack of interaction and communication among the first year students in their large and diverse classrooms. They were also concerned that their students did not know how to deal with diversity and they wanted to graduate students who would be successful in their professional careers in a multicultural environment.

In light of the above, I suggested that they incorporate two periods a week of Communication into their time-tables. They agreed on the proviso that they be involved in the teaching of this course so that they could be directly involved in the design and delivery thereof. With 15 years of experience in teaching Communication to students in the Applied Sciences, Arts, Commerce, Health Sciences, and Science faculties, I was keen to work with my colleagues in trying to find a solution to their problems. We agreed to team-teach. This paper therefore reports on this intervention and discusses how the course in Communication was developed to facilitate communication and interaction between the different cultures and race groups in a Science classroom. This paper hopes to build on literature in

its exploration of the ways in which students, educators and institutions of learning conceptualise and construct their experiences in relation to diversity issues. This paper also hopes to communicate the benefits of using an action research approach to address problems encountered in the classroom.

The Concept of Diversity

In seeking a conceptual base for this study, I realized that there is still much work to be done on developing a grounded conceptual framework for understanding the challenge of diversity in the multicultural classroom. Discussions on respect for diversity have been framed internationally within a broad notion of 'inclusive education'. Booth et al. (2003, p. 1) define inclusion as "consciously putting into action values based on equity, entitlement, community, participation and respect for diversity". Pendelbury and Enslin (2004, p. 45) see inclusion as overcoming "the barriers to participation of all in education, so as to extend to all students the human right to education and the right to participation in an inclusive polity". This is echoed by Engelbrecht et al. (2005) who feel that inclusion should be linked to the principles of integration, commonality and respect for all people. But, the term 'inclusion' proved to be limiting as a conceptual framework for this study as Sayed (2003, p. 3) explains, "inclusive policies may result in new forms of exclusion". Fraser and Honneth (2003, p. 7) present two different elements that respect for diversity might encompass, namely: the redistributive claim which seeks "more than just a distribution of resources and wealth" and the politics of recognition which "resists assimilation into dominant cultural norms, calling for the recognition of the distinctive perspectives of ethnic and racial groups, as well as sexual minorities and gender differences." Fraser and Honneth's explanation suited me as I was more open to the concept of diversity taking on a variety of forms in the experiences of the students, including race, culture, class, language and gender. This study was particularly interested in how students from different cultural backgrounds relate to and communicate with each other.

Culture

Culture, according to Marshall (2002, p. 8) and Meier (2007, p. 658) refers to the consistent ways in which people experience, make sense of, and respond to, the world around them; it represents the collective ways of doing of a given population; it is common to all human groups; it is shaped by historical, social, political, economic, and geographic factors. Cultures are based on social and linguistic communities. Fielding (1993, p. 50) defines culture as a system of beliefs, assumptions and values shared by a group of people. A multicultural learning environment refers to a situation where there are different or a diversity of cultures within a demographic area. According to du Toit (2004), multiculturalism is more than the expression of cultural variety. He explains that the 'problem' of multiculturalism concerns communication. Communication presupposes the existence not only of common languages, but also of messages with a different content and form, the possibility of misunderstanding and the influence of prejudice. He says for multiculturalism to 'succeed' and in order to stimulate peaceful coexistence, meaningful communication is a requisite. As Meier (2007, p. 660) says, people communicate within and between cultures by means of language, which is therefore central to their social relationships. Cultural differences therefore tend to be revealed in language, and

misunderstandings between people from different cultures tend to arise from their use of language to communicate with each other (Campbell 2004, p. 62).

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural or cross-cultural communication occurs between people from different cultures. As Meier (2007, p. 660) said, people communicate within and between cultures by means of language, which is therefore central to their social relationships. (Teng 2005, p. 1) adds that intercultural or cross-cultural communication is not only a need, but a requirement for success in today's pluralistic society. Williams (2003) in Teng (2005) defines cross-cultural communication skills as the ability to effectively interact with people of different cultures. Just (2004, p. 1) points out that it is through communicative interaction, understood broadly as the symbolic creation of shared meaning, that ties between the individual and the different groups with which she comes into contact are developed, maintained, altered, and perhaps discontinued'. Penington (1985) adds that like culture, language is learned and it serves to convey thoughts, transmit values, beliefs, perceptions and norms. Campbell (2004, pp. 42–43) concurs that language plays a crucial role in the transmission of culture. In order to achieve proper intercultural understanding, Meier (2007, p. 660) says that what is required is "informed intellectual appreciation of and engagement with cultural and individual differences, which presupposes recognition and acceptance, in principle, of the existence and inevitability of cultural diversity". Developing intercultural competence includes self-reflection, gathering information about your own and other cultures, appreciating cultural similarities and differences, using cultural resources, and acknowledging the essential equality and value of all cultures (Klein and Chen 2001, pp. 38–39). It is demonstrated, among other things, by the ability or sensitivity to interpret cultural styles of communication which include language, signs, gestures, body language and customs (Bennet 2003, pp. 32–33).

Using an Action Research Approach

Action research, says Huysamen (1994, p. 177), places a high premium on involving all participants in each of the above phases. This was supported by Neuman (2000, p. 25) who agreed that "those who are being studied participate in the research process". For example, in an educational context, the teachers and pupils will not be regarded as subjects who are going to be subjected to some treatment devised by an outsider. Insofar as these groups accept responsibility for the execution of the research and the implementation of its results, action research may be characterized as democratic. In other words, action research is "participatory" and "collaborative" (Melrose 2001; Reason and Bradbury 2001; and Zuber-Skerritt 1996).

A researcher could assume the role of 'external researcher' or 'participant observer' in action research. Dickson and Green (2001, p. 245) regard an external researcher as "an active participant" in participatory research, "bringing his/her own philosophy, experience and understanding to the research". They add that the external researcher is "often a catalyst" in enabling disadvantaged people to conduct research (2001, p. 246). My role was not one of an external researcher as I was involved in the process. According to McMillan (1996, p. 245) if the researcher is "a genuine participant in the activity being studied", then he or she is known as a participant observer. As participant observer, I observed the

students and their activities. I provided information (*see* Spradley 1980) as the need arose during the group work. Dickson (1997, p. 2) defined participatory action research as "an inquiry by ordinary people acting as researchers to explore questions in their daily lives, to recognise their own resources, and to produce knowledge and take action to overcome inequities, often in solidarity with external supporters". If the educators are to be regarded as 'ordinary people' with myself as the 'external support' and the group work is deemed as 'taking action to overcome inequities', then indeed, we engaged in participatory action research.

Participatory action research differs from other qualitative methods in the collaboration the researcher fosters with the participants (Linville et al. 2003, p. 210). Winter (2000, p. 144) agrees that an action research project relies for its effectiveness on creating collaborative relationships. Collaboration means the building up of democratic relationships between participants coming from different backgrounds, and having different expectations, needs and roles of those who involve themselves in a common project, and know that diversity is not a synonym of inequality (Perez et al. 1998, p. 250).

In this study, I did not "train participants to be co-researchers themselves" (Linville et al. 2003, p. 210), but collaboration within this study occurred on two levels. Firstly there was collaboration between the participants and myself, and secondly between the participants themselves. I was not in a position of power over the participants and did not have to use my "expertise to resolve the problems and provide the 'right' answer" (Perez et al. 1998, p. 251). The design of each phase was a collaborative or team effort. Collaboration in this study was successfully achieved among the participants. The educators were grateful for the "*continual and sustained interaction with our students*", and the students valued the "*intense involvement with our lecturers*". Information shared during the focus group discussions (after each phase of group work) enabled the educators, the students and myself to gauge where improvements were needed in the structure and definitely served to inform the subsequent phase in the action research cycle. The diversity of the participants lends different perspectives to the study and it is also important to remember that they are coming in as individuals with different roles in the project and as stakeholders having different needs and expectations. This diversity as well as the diverse make up of the population, whether in terms of level of expertise or status, race, role (student, lecturer, assessor or researcher), gender, language differences, lends credence and colour to the project. Stringer (1996, p. 148) agrees that all educational research should be: democratic, that is, enabling participation of people; equitable, by acknowledging people's equality of worth; liberating, by providing freedom from oppressive, debilitating conditions; and enhancing, by enabling the expression of people's full human potential.

The Study

As we only had two periods per week with the classes over 12 weeks, that is, a total of approximately twenty-four contact hours, we had to structure our lesson plans carefully to incorporate those aspects of communication that would address the problem on hand. In addition to lessons on communication theory, our classes focused on: culture and intercultural communication (which included discussions on stereotyping, ethnocentricity, acculturation, tolerance, respect, barriers to successful intercultural communication and identity), non-verbal communication, negotiation skills and conflict resolution. As interaction was a problem, we incorporated a lot of oral discussion and oral presentations into the lessons, but this had to be carefully managed as we had 80 students in our class.

Acknowledging that group work teaches valuable skills for the corporate world and enables effective management of large classes, this study sought to use group work to promote communication among the different cultures in the class for the benefit the students and the educators as well, because they too have to learn to function effectively with their students who come from diverse backgrounds just as their students have to communicate with them. It was agreed that group work would offer students opportunities to work together and that it offered a good alternative to the traditional method of lecturing to a mass of students (*see* du Plessis and Bisschoff 2007, p. 253 and The Centre for the Study of Higher Education 2002).

But working in groups is not as easy as it may seem. As du Plessis and Bisschoff (2007, p. 252) found, students coming to the university for the first time, or even starting a new class each semester, must find their place in a new group in which they must become members. Attinasi (1996) in Chang (2005, p. 774) explains that students are also confronted with the mass, distance and complexity of the social geography of the campus. While mass describes the large numbers of people on campus and complexity the general ignorance of each other's lives, social distance speaks to the lack of contact between members within the institution.

Participants in this study were totally voluntary and were made up of first year students and educators from diverse language and cultural backgrounds in the Faculty of Science at a university in Durban, South Africa. The educator sample was made up of one Zulu lecturer, one White lecturer, one Nigerian lecturer and myself (an Indian). The student sample included Chinese, Indian (from the following language groups: Gujerati, Hindi, Tamil, Urdu), Ndebele, Swazi, Tswana, White (from the follwing language groups: English and Afrikaans), Xhosa and Zulu students. The majority of the students, that is, 52% were Zulu, 20% were Indian, 9% were Xhosa, 6% were White, 5% were Ndebele, 4% were Tswana, 2% were Swazi and 2% were Chinese. A total of eighty-first year students formed the sample for this study. The study was therefore limited in terms of the population and geographical location and may therefore not reflect the situation at all tertiary institutions, but will undoubtedly add to the ways in which students, educators and institutions of learning conceptualise and construct their experiences in relation to diversity issues.

Ethical clearance to conduct research with the students was gained from the university before the study commenced. Participants were guaranteed anonymity in all communication and correspondence relating to the study. Pseudonyms were therefore used in all reporting and write-ups of the findings.

This study used an action research framework within a constructivist approach. As we needed to determine structure, format and administration of the Communication intervention using groupwork, it was necessary to employ techniques and tools that would provide for exploration and that would allow for modification along the way until a good "fit" (von Galsersfeld 1987, p. 5) for all the participants was acquired.

This study therefore drew on the common elements shared by the models of Calhoun (1994), Kemmis (1990), Lewin (1952), Sagor (1992), Stringer (1996) and Wells (1994) as explained by Mills (2000, p. 18). The area of focus was identified as a lack of interaction and communication among first year students in the large and diverse classrooms and students' lack of knowledge regarding how to deal with diversity and working in a multicultural environment. Group work structures were then devised in collaboration with the educators, and employed in phases. Data were collected in the form of focus group discussions with students and educators after each phase to gather information about their experiences. This structure was refined each time by addressing the comments, concerns and criticisms of the participants until a structure was arrived at to the satisfaction of all the

participants. Analyses of the focus group recordings and my observations during the group work sessions helped shape the next phase in the cycle of group work by spiralling us back into the process, again and again. The term 'spiral' is used, because in each phase of group work, we had to go back to the 'drawing board' as it were, start all over again and work our way to the 'top'. As Swepson (2003, p. 109) said, "the cyclic, critical review of values, methodology and results" enables one to "really learn from mistakes".

Nyof-Young (2000, p. 488) explains that "participants in an action research group learn both socially and individually. Their learning outcomes are a function on interaction and involvement". As such, analyses after each phase of the group work was fed back to the educators to inform the design of the subsequent phase. This continual feedback was crucial to the study as it enabled adjustments to me made to the subsequent phases of group work in the action research cycle. The composition of the groups was changed after each phase by asking each student to draw a name from a hat until a group of eight was formed. This constant changing of the groups was to ensure integration and was intended to give students an opportunity to communicate with different students in the class.

Findings

Our first task was to encourage students to talk to each other and to learn more about each other's cultures. When they were informed that they would have to work in groups, there was general resistance as some felt that they did not know each other well enough or that they did not meet each other either on or off campus and as such would not be able to work together. Students were also not enthusiastic about choosing their own groups of eight. The educators agreed to group the students themselves. As is often the case with students, the educators too thought that mixing the students in terms of their race meant the same as mixing them in terms of culture (*see also* Fataar 2007). What some of them did not understand was that race does not mean culture and that there may be a diversity of cultures within one race group, but I agreed as our intention was to get students talking to each other.

In the first phase of this study, students were asked to bring a cultural artefact (from their culture) and to discuss this object/symbol of their culture with their group. Each student was allowed a maximum of 3 min for their presentation.

Analyses of the focus group discussions after the first phase revealed that students experienced difficulty in communicating within their groups. Commenting on the reactions of others within their groups, Sihle said, "*I could see Pregasen grinning while I was talking, what does he think, that my culture is silly?*" Natalie said, "*I couldn't eat the phutu he brought, I don't know whether he used dog meat in it*". The discussions revealed a lot of ignorance on the part of the students in terms of their knowledge of each other's cultures. As one educator commented, "*the lack of respect for other's culture is worrying*".

For the second phase of group work, the task was for each student to research the culture of another student in their group. They had to choose a culture that they knew very little or nothing about. As part of their research, they had to interview a student from their class who belonged to that cultural group. They also had to bring an artefact from that culture. Each student then had to present their findings to their group. Analysis of the focus group discussions after the second phase revealed that while some students seriously researched the task, others preferred to fabricate their information as they were "*not particularly interested in learning about another culture*". Phase two was followed by lessons and exercises during the Communication periods on ethnocentricity, respect and tolerance.

For phase three of the group work, students had to observe and interpret the non-verbal behaviour of the members of their group. They then had to demonstrate and explain what they had observed. While some of the interpretations drew laughter, other interpretations made students upset because they felt that they were being ridiculed. Analysis of the focus group discussions revealed how often misunderstandings and misinterpretations in terms of non-verbal communication occurred. Many students were also unaware of the important role that body language, facial expressions, posture, and forms of non-verbal communication play in the communication process. One student was very puzzled when another commented on how she felt when her body space was invaded, "*what is that*?" she asked. Discussions revealed that because some people (as a consequence of apartheid) are/were forced to live in confined spaces, they were not even aware of body space or personal space. This phase was an introduction to the lessons in non-verbal communication.

In phase four, each student had to take on the role of person from a different culture (the one they had researched in phase two) and they had to discuss how they felt about people from their own cultural group. During the focus group discussions that followed, students said this exercise enabled them to "*say out loud how we really feel*" and "*we can see how they feel about us*". As was expected, many stereotypes emerged from this task and this provided the ideal platform for the lessons on perception and stereotyping that followed. One of the educators said that he found these discussions "particularly useful" as "*I am learning more about my students and their cultures. It will also help me to understand my colleagues better*".

Phase five of the group work focused on newspaper articles or media reports of cultural intolerance and violence. In this phase, students were asked to use the knowledge they had so far of the other cultural groups and their lessons in communication to comment on how particular cases should be dealt with. An example of one such case was the incident at a taxi rank in Durban, South Africa where a Zulu woman who was dressed in pants and a shirt, was forced by the male taxi drivers to take off her pants and parade in her panty so that everyone could ridicule her. This incident was borne out of the belief that women and in particular, Zulu women should not wear pants. In pronouncing judgement on the case and talking about how this case should be dealt with, interesting and thought provoking discussions emerged on women's rights, the role of culture in the twentyfirst century, the role of men and women in different cultures, patriarchal cultures, etc. It was rather interesting to note how students from different cultures were identifying with each other. They were supporting each other's views by drawing on similarities between their cultures. During the focus group discussions, many of the students agreed that "*although we look different, we do some things the same*" and "*I didn't know that Zulu people and Hindus have things in common, like ancestor worship*". Of course this phase was a pre-amble to teaching them about negotiation and conflict resolution, but it paved the way for discussions on other topics as well.

In phase six of the lessons, students were asked to put together a concert where they had to sing, dance, read, recite a poem, tell a story, do a show-and-tell or act in a play about their or someone else's culture. The group had to decide on what they were going to present and they then had to conduct research into the chosen form of art. The educators assisted with the planning of the programme and in co-ordinating the event so that the students could focus on researching and rehearsing their acts. Students had to draw on all aspects of their course to accomplish this task. Discussions after phase six revealed that although there were many conflicts to resolve, the fact that they had interacted with each other and learnt about each other's cultures, they were able to deal with the problems that arose. Students and the educators felt that the concert was a success, not only because it was entertaining, but also because, in the words of an

educator, "*it helped me to bond with my students*". Another educator agreed that "*having communicated with my students so much over the year, it has helped me to understand them better and it has also helped me to understand other cultures better*". Comments from the students included: "*at least now, I can talk to my classmates, I know them better*", "*I know that I must not eat bacon when Mahomed is with me*", "*when Zinhle tilts her head and draws circles in the sand with her toes, it means she likes me*" and "*at least now when I sit on my own, the others won't think I'm being anti-social, they will understand that I need my space, but that we're cool*".

It was rather amazing to see how much of change had taken place in this group of students since the beginning of this course. The educators were "*satisfied with how the course turned out*" and they were grateful for all the interaction and communication that it encouraged.

Conclusion

This study found that using an action research approach was particularly successful in teaching Communication and especially in encouraging intercultural communication as lessons learned could be built upon or learned from in order to plan the next phase of intervention. The continual interaction through the various phases typical of the action research approach used, encouraged students to communicate with each other and also enabled the educators to use what they had learned in the "next cycle of enquiry" (Udas 1998, p. 611). The educators agreed that using group work was definitely useful in getting students to interact with each other, but they felt that this method was given impetus by the action research approach employed. As one educator said "*group work was definitely a good idea, but the mere fact that we could continually change the composition of the groups by learning from what worked and what didn't, really gave this study a big boost. If we had gone the traditional route, the benefits would not have been as stark*!" While 95% of the educators agreed that they learnt "*valuable lessons from using the action research approach*", one educator complained that it was "*too much of work. I mean, who has the time to conduct such research*?" The educators were also grateful that they had learned "*a new way of solving problems*" in their classrooms, and that "*we can now find solutions and conduct research on all sorts of issues that arise in terms of our teaching, our students, institutional matters, I mean, this action research is great*". The educators were really curious to learn more about action research and asked for references for further reading in this regard. Two of the educators were embarking on postgraduate studies and asked me to teach them more as they wanted to use action research in their studies as they agreed that it is "*a very useful and common sense way to do research*".

The students too benefitted from the intense interaction afforded by the cyclical approach. One student said that "*we got to meet and talk to each other more now over a few weeks than we ever did*". Another added, "*we also got to interact with our lecturers a lot. We never get to do that. So, this way of teaching us, was really good. Now we all know each other better*".

This study found that institutions of learning do not have to embark on expensive exercises to promote cultural awareness and tolerance and that by merely encouraging interaction and communication, this aim can be achieved. Granted, this is a gradual process, but at least if students are taught about culture and they are encouraged to participate

in discussions with others about the subject, it will go a long way in promoting intercultural communication. As Shi (2006) says newcomers to an institution do not do not just passively absorb the communicative norms and behavioral values poured down on them by institutional structures, instead, they actively co-construct their socialization which is shaped by their historical, political and socio-structural contexts, which include their race, class, gender, ethnicity, etc. The way has to be paved for students to start associating and communicating with each other and for them to overcome their prejudices. Ethnocentrism and cultural issues have to be addressed at the institution in order for open dialogue to commence. Students need to stop regarding each other with suspicion. Students need to acknowledge that they are indeed different but they must also recognize that they need to learn to communicate with, tolerate and work with each other.

This study found that action research is the ideal means to achieve the above. The collaborations and levels of participation that this method encourages and fosters among participants engenders buy-in from everybody involved in the research. The spiral or cyclical nature of inquiry which requires an address of the shortcomings of the previous phase (in designing the subsequent phase) encourages input from all the participants as their perceptions, feelings and experiences are drawn upon. Action Research is particularly useful in the context of the South African classroom, because of the diversity, disparity, historical, social, socio-economic, political and language backgrounds that abound. Action research using focus group discussions and/or group work can serve a transformative purpose in getting people to talk to each other, talk in the presence of others, in listening to others talk, and giving them opportunities to respond when others talk—some of which they do not always get the chance to do because of segregation.

Cultivating a respect for cultural diversity will hopefully lead to tolerance among students of different cultures among their own race groups. By learning about the different cultural practices, beliefs and ways of life, students will be exposed to new and different world views. This awareness will hopefully in turn, broaden and inform their perceptions of diversity leading to greater acceptance and tolerance of diversity in terms of race. These goals cannot be attained overnight, but sustained, carefully planned intervention on the part of the institutions can reap numerous rewards not only for the students, but for the educators and indeed all players in a multicultural environment.

In celebration of multilingualism, issues of culture and diversity need to be integrated into the curriculum. Educators also need to be trained to deal with these issues so that they will be able to skillfully handle discussions and debates in the classroom. This study found that group work did in fact lead to open dialogue and encouraged students and educators to express their thoughts which were not done before. Working in groups within an action research methodology meant that students were interacting and collaborating with different personalities, perspectives and backgrounds each time thus learning more about each other. This interaction enabled the unearthing of feelings, problems and issues which would otherwise not have surfaced in the normal classroom where students are merely lectured. By transforming method and methodology, students and educators could be exposed to new and different ways of being. Only if we are able to accept and celebrate our differences, can we hope to meaningfully transform not only our curricula but our lives as well so that we move forward as a nation.

This study reported only on the Communication intervention in trying to encourage interaction and communication among the different cultural groups at a university in South Africa and did not report on the incidents and causes of miscommunication that arose during this study and how they were dealt with.

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