# Adult learning and social reconciliation:

# A case study of an academic programme

# at a Western Cape higher education institution

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**KEYWORDS**

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Inclusivity

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Sameness

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ACE          Advanced Certificate for Education in School Leadership

DOE          Department of Education

DHET         Department of Higher Education and Training

MRTEQ        Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications

PGCE         Post-graduate Certificate for Education

TRC          Truth and Reconciliation Commission

WCED         Western Cape Education Department

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# ABSTRACT

Heterogeneous school communities are becoming more apparent under local and global conditions. A school community is more diverse and similar, not only racially but also in respect of economic, cultural, national and ethnic identities. Schools would require leaders who are mindful of the need for conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation within a globalising classroom.

Through the lens of critical constructivism, I investigated the extent to which a higher education institution achieved the aims of the ACE in School Leadership, a continuing professional development programme. I relied upon a qualitative research approach to gather rich descriptive data from interviews conducted with nine school leaders who had graduated from the ACE School Leadership programme. The Literature Review is based on readings regarding critical constructivism, globalisation, conflict-sensitivity and reconciliation.

I found that the programme expanded the school leaders' basic knowledge about conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation, but not sufficiently in terms of developing a critical consciousness to deal with conflict effectively. I concluded that conflict-sensitive schools required school leaders that produced knowledge critically through a rigorous process of engagement and reflection. The ACE School Leadership programme had limitations in the extent to which it could prepare and equip school leaders in this regard.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## DECLARATION

I declare that *Adult learning and social reconciliation: A case study of an academic programme at a Western Cape higher education institution* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Valdi Van Reenen-Le Roux

Signed:………………………………………… July 2012

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# SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In post-apartheid South Africa, school communities are becoming heterogeneous groups of parents, learners and educators[1]. Under conditions of globalisation, political strife and South Africa's transition to democracy, migration (particularly from the Great Lakes, the Great Horn and Southern African countries) has influenced the composition of school communities in South Africa today. The country is no stranger to diversity and sameness[2]. Unlike the past, where diversity and sameness were located within the context of separatism, democratic South Africa embraces diversity within the context of inclusivity. But in spite of an inclusive approach set out in the country's human rights-based legislative framework and education policies, disregard for the 'other' has led to tensions and at times, violence in school communities.

## RESEARCH RATIONALE

Since educators are the implementers of educational policies, the success of educational reform is dependent, among others on how well they are prepared and equipped to drive social change. Colenso (2005:413) suggests that conflict in schools is driven by discriminatory and exclusionary practices found in policies, biases in resource allocation, lack of representation in governance structures, language of learning and teaching and content of the curriculum. Issues of conflict, according to Novelli and Cardozo (2008:476), complicate learning and teaching because educational systems become both 'victims' and 'perpetrators' of conflict. As a perpetrator, education can promote violence (Smith, 2005:376) through exclusionary practices visible in, for example, language and admission policies, values and attitudes towards minority groups, curriculum development and pedagogical methods.

Drawing on Novelli and Cardozo's assertion that educational systems can be both 'victims' and 'perpetrators' of conflict, in the South African context, education has been both the 'victim of' and 'perpetrator for' the apartheid state (2008:478). Educational reform has focused on providing education in South Africa with a 'positive face' (Bush & Saltarelli, cited in Novelli & Cardozo, 2008:479) that works towards inclusive and reconciliatory practices.

Consequently, there are implications for adult learning in the context of the school leader's preparedness to teach, lead and manage in ways that promote conflict sensitivity. The South African school leader is likely to have been a learner or a teacher during the apartheid era and will need support to deliver the 'positive face' of education. Continuing professional development programmes have a crucial role in helping educators to become contributors

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[1]The Department of Education in its policies draws a distinction between a teacher and an educator. The term educator encompasses a wide range of education officials who contribute to teaching and learning and includes the term teacher. The term, teacher however refers only to the classroom context of an educator and is seen as someone who teachers a subject, learning area, grade or phase.

[2] Sameness refers to a group of people who are homogenous in the sense that they share a dominant identity.

of social change. To this end, I investigated the extent to which the ACE School Leadership Programme offered by a Western-Cape based university prepared and equipped school leaders as agents of social reconciliation within their school communities.

The qualification was designed according to the prescriptions of the Norms and Standards for Educators policy (Department of Education, 2000) targeting principals and deputy principals. In July 2011, the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011) replaced the Norms and Standards for Educators policy. The current policy, however, continues to fulfil the purpose of the previous policy with regard to preparing educators as adult learners for their contribution towards social change.

With specific reference to policy requirements, the role assigned to the educator as community, citizen and pastoral caregiver forms an integral part in the design of the ACE and is embedded in the five aims of the programme. In order to investigate whether the aims were achieved, I focused on social reconciliation and conflict-sensitivity as two crucial values that would be required in pursuing social transformation. My research has focussed on the graduates of the 2008 cohort using DOE's course outline (version 6) and programme material.

## BACKGROUND

### The South African Classroom

Teaching and learning in the South African classroom under conditions of colonialism and apartheid have been in the context of racial domination and segregation, in particular white domination over black (Nkomo, Chisholm & McKinney, 2004:1). Since the late 1980s, the country has witnessed a steady increase in racial diversity in schools as parents exercise their right to choose a school for their children regardless of geographic location, school fees or other potentially discouraging factors. From a racial perspective, black learner enrolment at former white English-speaking schools has advanced rapidly, while the composition of learners in predominately black African, Indian and Coloured communities has remained virtually the same since apartheid (Soudien, 2004:97). However, this trend has changed to a certain extent, with more black African learners at schools with a predominantly black Coloured learner population.

Learning and teaching in the context of social inclusion and reconciliation, however, are a relatively new experience for educators in South Africa. Racial diversity of educators has progressed at a slower pace than that of learners. The majority of South African educators were learners in an apartheid education system and most likely began their careers under conditions of racial separatism. In addition to its domestic challenges, the increase in immigration to South Africa has also impacted on the composition of the classroom. Labour shortages, especially for Mathematics and Science subjects, have contributed to the

appointment of immigrant teachers. Immigrant learners have contributed to a globalised South African classroom.

Even though racial composition is an important factor influencing the heterogeneity in South African classrooms, it is certainly not the only factor. A school community may have racial sameness but might be diverse in terms of language, economic status, cultural identities and ethnicities. For example, a school consisting predominantly of black African learners and educators may have a learner population who represent different nationalities, speak different languages and subscribe to different cultural and social values. Similarly, a racially mixed school may find its homogeneity resting in a majority of middle-class learners, parents and educators who have the same views on social and economic development. Educators may not be fully equipped to respond to conflict (Hemson, 2006:51) in ways that would sustain social reconciliation. Knowledge, values and attitudes that favour inclusivity and are coupled to skills which enforce conflict sensitive approaches are needed to give life to such progressive policies.

**The ACE School Leadership Programme**

The ACE was collaboratively designed by the Department of Education, certain Higher Education Institutions and other stakeholders not only as a continuing professional development programme for school leaders as adult learners but also as part of a broader strategy to improve school leadership effectiveness in South Africa.

The vision (Department of Education, 2007g) for the programme is 'to provide structured learning opportunities that, while recognising the diverse contexts in which schools operate, promote quality education in South African schools through the development of a corps of educational leaders who apply critical understanding, values, knowledge and skills to school leadership and management in line with the vision of democratic transformation.'

Given the vision of the ACE, my research is based on the assumption that critical constructivism features as a theory of learning in the programme design. Critical constructivism is a theory of learning that requires the school leader as an adult learner to critically construct knowledge that will enable her to become an agent of social justice and change (Bentley, Fleury & Garrison, 2007:20; Kincheloe, 2008:5).

**AIMS OF THE RESEARCH**

Against the backdrop of the country's oppressive past and the changing diversity in classrooms, the aim of this research was to investigate the extent to which a continuing professional development teacher education programme, the ACE School Leadership programme, prepares and equips educators in leadership roles (school principal or deputy principal) as agents of social reconciliation.

**RESEARCH QUESTION**

The main research question is: To what extent does the ACE School Leadership Programme prepare and equip school leaders for their task as agents of social reconciliation?

I relied on eight sub-questions to unpack the main research question:

- To what extent does the ACE provide knowledge about conflict, diversity and reconciliation?
- To what extent does the ACE enable educators to develop a contextual understanding of the changes in the socio-economic and political context?
- How does the ACE enable the educators to understand the 'other'?
- How does the ACE enable the school leader to develop a theoretical knowledge about social reconciliation strategies?
- How does the ACE prepare school leaders to deal with conflict that arises out of diversity challenges?
- What strategies and skills does the ACE provide that enables educators to facilitate social reconciliation?
- To what extent does the ACE enable school leaders to reflect upon themselves as agents of social reconciliation?
- To what extent is the design of the ACE based on policy requirements?

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study has certain limitations. The qualitative research focuses on the ACE offered at one higher education learning institution in the Western Cape. Since the sample was taken from the 2008 cohorts who graduated in 2009 and 2010, the course outline (version 6) was utilised as a source and therefore the generalizability of the findings would be applicable to similar settings. The course in its entirety is not explored.

The interviews were conducted in English even though the mother tongues of some interviewees were Xhosa and Afrikaans. Due to time constraints, one interview was conducted with each of the participants. It was difficult to ascertain whether the participants gained their understanding of themselves as agents of social reconciliation from the programme or through other learning experiences.

Adult learners may have gained their understanding of reconciliation elsewhere, perhaps through their experiences as social and political activists or as an inherent personality trait. The ACE may not have been designed with reconciliation as a means to resolving conflict. Lastly, the ACE may very well address conflict resolution but not necessarily from a reconciliation perspective.

# SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## GLOBALISATION, CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIVISM AND ADULT LEARNING

The potential for conflict to arise as a response to diversity and sameness is a worrisome reality across the globe. Taking into account Ziegahn's view that migration offers opportunity for both growth and conflict, the increase of xenophobia worldwide suggests that the latter is more likely to occur (2007:2). In addition to local fractures, school leadership is confronted with the added responsibility of ensuring that the globalising classroom does not impact negatively on teaching and learning. Current literature (Magendzo, 2005:137; Ferreira, 2008:38) reflects the quest of educators worldwide to find ways in which conflict-sensitive approaches can inform their practices as educators and adult learners. From a critical constructivist perspective, the opportunity for diverse identities to either clash or cohere within the school community depends on how power relations are addressed in the knowledge production of the 'other' (Kincheloe, 2008:6). Colenso (2005:413) states that while education cannot be the panacea for social change, it does have a role to play in preparing and creating social harmony.

In this paper, I frame my conceptual framework within critical constructivism which argues that since knowledge is produced in a socially constructed world by a social and cultural being, knowledge production is not a neutral process. Unlike the constructivist theory of learning, critical constructivism believes that knowledge production should be constructed, analysed and interpreted through a critical lens. Kincheloe (2008:42) argues that a 'dialogical relationship exists between the knower and the known.' Power dynamics, values and multiple identities of the knower (the school leader) influences the way in which the 'known' is produced. According to critical constructivists (Bentley, Fleury & Garrison, 2007:11) the 'known' has to be produced within a critical consciousness. Critical constructivist, Kincheloe (2008:43), defines critical constructivism as a rigorous knowledge production process which leads to 'critical constructions' that 'provides a richer insight into a phenomenon,' 'grant access to new possibilities of meaning' and 'benefit the marginalised group in their struggle for empowerment.' Conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation are values that enable empowerment to become a reality and can be seen as important constructions in critical constructivist thinking.

The epistemological viewpoint of critical constructivists (Bentley, Fleury & Garrison, 2007:12, Kincheloe, 2008:8) argues that since social and historical dynamics construct people and the world they live in, knowledge production is not a neutral, decontextualised process. By implication, knowledge is seen as subjective and biased, depending on the social and historical orientation of the principal or deputy principal. School leaders from diverse backgrounds might view the world and their immediate surroundings differently. If knowledge construction is void of a critical lens, parents, learners and educators are bound to hold strong views about the 'other.' As a consequence, in a globalising school, the

uncritical construction of knowledge about the 'other' will not necessarily produce a climate for social justice and change. A globalising school would need values such as conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation embedded in the 'rigorous' process of critically constructing knowledge.

Critical theorists believe that the political, economic and social surroundings of an individual shape the person's social consciousness (Kincheloe, 2008:30). Relying on the underpinnings of critical theory, critical constructivists argue that knowledge should not be taken at face value because its construction is influenced by power dynamics. They hold the view that the process of learning including the learner and the construction (that which is learnt) should be critically evaluated to understand the impact of dominant power forces on knowledge construction.

Proponents of critical constructivism argue for a critical understanding not only of the learning and teaching process but also the production of knowledge. Henry (2002), cited in Kincheloe (2008:31), states that knowledge production requires the learner to make 'reasoned judgement through inquiry processes.' Through critical constructivist thinking, Bentley, Fleury and Garrison (2007:16) suggest that educators as adult learners can develop a social consciousness with 'a socially critical edge.' This 'edge' in the context of a globalising school would require school leaders that value a conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory approach to fostering inclusion to benefit the marginalised group in their struggle for empowerment. Takacs (2003), cited in Bentley, Fleury and Garrison (2007:16), supports critical constructivists' argument that learners are able to emerge with a critical consciousness of their reality if taught to think and reflect critically. From a critical constructivist viewpoint, conflict-sensitive schools are learning spaces that consciously tackle discriminatory and exclusionary practices. Teaching and learning in respect of conflict sensitivity should be centred on learners developing a critical social consciousness that enables the construction of knowledge based on human rights and social-reconciliatory values.

**Critical constructivism and the identity of educators as adult learners**

Hemson (2006:48) argues that teacher education can make a meaningful contribution to social change by developing teachers with a critical consciousness. He argues for a teacher development framework which acknowledges the effect of 'a variety of forms of exclusion and subordination' on the attainment of equality. Drawing on Young's five 'faces' of oppression (exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence) Hemson (2006: 46) suggests that teacher education should not simply emphasise an understanding diversity and integration but rather on how these faces of oppression are implicated in exclusionary practices.

Nkomo and Vandeyar's findings suggest that teachers who utilise progressive pedagogical practices and display a positive demeanour are more likely to improve learners' sense of

belonging and acceptance in diverse classrooms (2008:21). The same study found that while learners were integrated, the teacher composition was mainly from one specific racial group. The danger of a dominant race-based staff is the increased chance of an assimilatory approach to multiculturalism. Grant and Secada (1990:406), however, warn against the assumption that teachers sharing the same identity as learners will necessarily hold the same views. Hemson (2006:44) similarly argues that the benefit of diverse teaching staff 'will enable, but not ensure access to different life experiences'.

Taking into account the multiple identities of people, Hall (2003:22) contends that different dimensions of our identity come into play not least in the workplace. Hall's way of theorising about identity is helpful (2003:23). He argues that identity, which is often seen in the context of shared or collective histories, can also be understood as a construct which includes past and present realities. Consequently, Hall (2003:19) also views identity being 'unstable, metamorphic and even contradictory, marked by multiple points of similarities as well as difference'. He urges careful consideration of ways that 'diverse' cultural identities impact our relations with each other. Notwithstanding the fact that identity is influenced by power relations, one has to guard against stereotypical views about sameness. Kincheloe (2008:6) argues that identity plays an important role in critical constructivist thinking. Critical constructivist teaching requires that the educator consider how the influence of her identity and power relations affects teaching practices. Raising a critical consciousness regarding educator identity in teaching practices is clearly an important focal area.

Since teaching and learning in a critical constructivist paradigm are inextricably linked to the kind of knowledge the school leader produces and accepts as worthy or valid, the role of the educator becomes paramount. Kincheloe (2008:10) believes that the identity of both educator and learner matters in a critical constructivist school. Learners enter the school with set views of the world, people and institutions. These stereotypical views shape the way in which they learn or open themselves to learning. Likewise the educator as a socially and historically constructed being has an identity not separate from the world she lives in.

From a critical constructivist point of view, a classroom does not comprise homogenous group of learners. The South African classroom consisting of learners from different nationalities, racial, cultural and economic backgrounds might construct knowledge about the same topic very differently. For example, immigrant learners' view of their new surroundings will be influenced by their lived experiences in their birth country. South African learners, on the other hand, may find it difficult to understand their immigrant peers' perceptions, since their own views of the country are shaped by past and present socio-political and economic circumstances. Even among South African learners, perceptions of the country may differ. Given the reality that the hegemonic force rests in the hands of the dominant group, South African learners, xenophobic sentiments which have spilled over into playgrounds demonstrates how the impact of harmful knowledge construction can have detrimental consequences on the lives of subjugated group, immigrants.

As Brookfield (1995:9) aptly puts it, 'classrooms are contested spaces, whirlpools containing contradictory cross-currents of struggles for material superiority and ideological legitimacy that exist in the world outside'. By implication, critical constructivists expect the educator to play an active role in assisting the learner to gain a 'social and critical consciousness' through analysing, interpreting and evaluating the learning process. Without critical engagement, stereotypical views will persist and jeopardise the opportunity for education to contribute to social justice and democracy values needed for social reconciliation.

A critical constructivist perspective of adult learning can assist educators to become critically aware of how their own identities shape the way in which they produce their personal concept of social consciousness and consequently influence the way in which they teach and learn. Furthermore, how they understand their identity can influence their perspective of others, particularly learners and the broader school community. Conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation are values related to democratic citizenry that in relation to their identities, educators should be mindful of.

While educators have little control over the social and historical contexts in which they find themselves, they are in control of how these contexts influence their belief systems, values and actions. Bentley, Fleury and Garrison (2007:20) advocate a critical constructivist model that 'places its emphasis on reflection, imagination, social consciousness and democratic citizenship'. They argue that 'knowledge needs to be interpreted in a process that allows for the deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge as critical, creative and mindful approaches to teaching and learning'. To this end, willingness on the part of educators to open themselves to introspection is a non-negotiable prerequisite. Consequently, a shift in the approach to adult learning is required in order to 'learn to think, teach and live democratically' (Kincheloe, 2008:11).

Critical constructivist conceptualisations therefore seem appropriate for educators who would like to embrace conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation as crucial values for social transformation. Educators as adult learners who utilise critical constructivism as a theoretical framework can gain a critical consciousness not only of how people construct the 'other', but how to counter hegemonic constructions of the 'other'. Kincheloe (2008:12) argues that schools that do not utilise 'informed modes of making meaning reinforce patriarchal structures, Eurocentric educational practices, homophobia and racism'. He argues that learners improve their knowledge about themselves by applying 'critical theoretical insights to bring consciousness to the process by which their consciousness was constructed'. Kincheloe (2008:50) refers to this consciousness as the 'consciousness of complexity'. Educators who are able to gain a 'consciousness of complexity', according to Kincheloe (2008:50), are able to develop 'higher order thinking, a new level of awareness'.

Brookfield's (1995:11) four adult learning processes are helpful in further unpacking the link between critical constructivism and adult learning. In his view, adult learning requires the educator, as an adult learner, willing to learn how to learn through self-directed learning.

Paradoxically, the adult learner has the benefit of having experienced life and the disadvantage of these very lived experiences entrenching set ways of learning and teaching. Self-directed learning grounded in critical reflection enables educators as adult learners to interpret firstly how 'power undergird(s), frame(s) and distort(s) educational processes' and secondly, how deeply entrenched assumptions and teaching practices negatively impact learning and teaching.

The complexity of the reality of the educator as an adult learner (Kincheloe, 2008: 21) in this instance cannot be separated from the interpretative act. Hermeneutics involves the philosophical inquiry into the influences of different contexts on the interpretive process of constructing meaning. Critical constructivists' are drawn to critical hermeneutics, which locates its philosophical inquiry in understanding how power dynamics within these contexts (Kincheloe, 2008:20) influence the act of interpretation. To this end, and in keeping with critical constructivists' and critical theorists' thinking, critical hermeneutics acknowledges the existence of multiple perspectives in the construction of meaning. Within that reality, critical hermeneutics (Kincheloe, 2008:21) empowers educators as adult learners to recognise the manner in which 'power operates and the ways institutions and interests deploy power in the effort to survive, shape behaviour and gain dominance over others, or in a more productive vein improve the human condition'. Adult learning which advances the learners' critical analytical and interpretative ability to critically reflect and assess will increase the likelihood of the teacher making 'informed decisions and taking informed actions' (Brookfield, 1995:26) in the interest of social justice.

**Globalisation, conflict sensitivity and educators as adult learners: International perspectives**

Paradoxically, the need for conflict-sensitive classrooms has arisen through local and global political, social and economic conditions. For educators across the globe, constant educational reform (Beaver, 2009, Gregson & Sturke 2007, Tarcs & Smaller, 2009), coupled to global changes, has contributed to the need for continuing adult learning. Gregson and Sturke (2007:1) argue that 'complex changes require teachers to rethink their beliefs about teaching and practice in their classrooms'. Although many educators embrace adult learning as part of their continuing professional development (Tarcs & Smaller, 2009:123), learning that provide opportunities to 'investigate, experiment, reflect, discuss and collaborate' with other educators in order to change their practice is sought after (Gregson & Sturke, 2007:1).

Cheng (2004) considers globalisation as a prominent, unavoidable feature of life which exists in 'multiple forms'. Two of these forms, social and learning globalisation, are relevant to this research. In defining social globalisation (Cheng, 2004) leans towards Giddens' definition, cited in Smith (2002), as the 'intensification of worldwide social relations which links distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'. Learning globalisation, as coined by Cheng (2004), implies that global interconnectedness offers opportunities to learn from local and global contexts.

Smith (2002) argues that these interconnected social relations have 'powerful economic, political, cultural and social dimensions' which from a critical constructivist perspective can harm or advance the value of conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory approaches. Social globalisation and learning globalisation, according to Cheng (2004:8), has connected people across the global divide through technological advances and migration, affording greater opportunities for 'sharing knowledge, technology, social values, and behavioural norms and promoting development at different levels including individuals, organizations, communities, and societies across different countries and cultures'.

Taking Cheng's concept of learning globalisation into account, the opportunity for local learning to inform a global practice on nurturing conflict-sensitive classrooms worldwide is appealing. There is a growing body of literature on educators' experiences in attempting to deal with conflict emanating from diversity and sameness within their local contexts. Educators globally are searching for ways in which their classrooms can become conflict-sensitive heterogeneous settings (Magendzo, 2005:137; Ferreira, 2008:38). In these settings, an assimilatory approach to diversity management is seen as counter-productive and a driver of simmering tensions that has the potential to explode into violent exchanges (Young, 2003, 343). While educators have articulated what is not permissible in a conflict-sensitive classroom, there is a scarcity of literature that clearly defines a conflict-sensitive approach.

The search for human rights-based approaches to nurturing conflict sensitivity in the classroom speaks to the need for a global practice that is informed in my view by critical constructivist thinking and collaborative learning, but also situated learning, through Lave and Wenger (1991), communities of practice. In this way, local contexts can inform global practice. The possibility of a global practice emerging will strengthen Cheng's contention (2004) that globalisation, despite all its negativities, has the potential to contribute positively to human development. Critical constructivist, Kincheloe's advice to educators, however, is to consider 'that nothing represents a neutral perspective ... Indeed; no truly objective way of seeing exists. Nothing exists before consciousness shapes it into something we perceive' (2008:8). Global learning through a social-reconciliatory approach to conflict-sensitive classrooms, as in the case of any knowledge construction, should therefore not be accepted on face value but critically examined and challenged.

Conflict breaches social relations and destroys the social fabric. It is possible to have a diverse country with insufficient social cohesion among people because of the simmering tensions. Soudien (2004:96) makes the point that racial integration in South African schools does not mean that schools practise inclusivity. Smith (2005:376) sets aside three areas where the educational purpose may be usurped to fulfil hegemonic ideals in political, economic and social contexts. Firstly, education geared toward building patriotism and national unity can lead to a superiority complex that harbours exclusionary practices towards other nationalities. Waghid (2009:402) reaches the same conclusion in his research

on the consequences of policies which promote national unity and patriotism in South African schools. Secondly, according to Smith (2005:376), education for economic development may enhance expectations of entitlement and economic prosperity at the expense of marginalising others. Lastly, Smith (2005:376) warns against education as a means of inculcating social norms and values that produce 'negative stereotypes and attitudes against others'.

Magendzo (2005:139), drawing on his experiences of human rights education for in-service teachers in Latin America, suggests that there is a gravitation towards homogenisation despite the presence of diversity. He emphasises that 'most people, including teachers, are largely incapable of recognising the 'other' as a legitimate other and to accept the existence of social and cultural diversity'. Tawil and Harley, cited in Smith (2005:382), support Magendzo's view, indicating that teachers are part of the community and find it difficult to separate themselves emotionally from the impact of conflict on the victims' human rights. According to Magendzo (2005:139), teacher training, underpinned by critical pedagogy, should assist educators in understanding the consequences of 'othering' and work towards changing attitudes and behaviour patterns in this regard. In seeking sustainable, long-term solutions, Smith (2005:377), backed by Norvelli and Cardozzo (2008), argues for education systems that are capable and prepared to deal with conflict. Learning institutions, according to Novelli and Cardozzo (2008:478), should be places where constructive solutions can be advocated to address 'a wide range of inequalities that have emerged out of recent processes of globalisation'. Simply put, educators are the ones expected to perform these miracles. With this in mind, the need for continuing professional development for educators which supports them in creating conflict-sensitive classrooms where sameness and diversity are not viewed as threatening but as crucial to implementing conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation values, is a global necessity.

Knowles, cited in Merriam and Brockett (2007), describes andragogy as opposed to pedagogy as 'the art and science of helping adults to learn'. Merriam and Brockett (2007:3) define adult learning as 'the cognitive process internal to the learner; it is what the learner does in a teacher-learning transaction as opposed to what the educator does'. Brookfield (1995:1-28) highlights self-directed learning, critical reflection, experiential learning and learning to learn as four key areas typical of how adults learn. Beaver (2009) puts forward the idea that 'good' teachers are unique as adult learners in terms of their distinct ways of problem solving, questioning, challenging and adapting to actively meet the needs of their students'. In research conducted by Tarcs and Smaller (2009:129) with Canadian educators on work and learning, the findings indicate that educators saw themselves as learning continuously in order to inform their teaching practices. A high percentage (78%) of the sample regarded informal and self-directed learning as most helpful to their continuing professional development. Collaborative learning (70% of the sample) remained a dominant and popular way of adult learning for these educators.

Saito (2003), in reflecting on the Japanese experience, offers a dialogical approach for the promotion of 'global understanding' and 'global education', calling for a greater collaboration among educators in the sharing of their experiences while 'affirming their own diverse settings'. In this way Saito suggests educators can build solidarity, raise their own social consciousness and that of 'others' at local and global levels. A growing body of literature documenting educators' experiences in creating inclusive, conflict-sensitive schools is enabling local contexts to inform global practice as Saito suggests. I present two examples as perspectives.

In Latin American, educationist, Magendzo draws on his twenty years of experience in facilitating human rights education with Chilean teachers transitioning from an oppressive past. Magendzo (2005:141) puts forward the idea that Chilean educators require a pedagogical approach that enables a critical analysis of their own behaviour and that of those in power and 'others', particularly behaviour that is linked to 'prejudice, intolerance, discrimination, negation of diversity, authoritarianism and antidemocratic' thinking. Since Chilean teachers, according to Magendzo (2005:141), are accustomed to authoritarian practice where questioning is not the norm, a critical pedagogical approach will be challenging. He raises the concern that Chilean educators who are themselves victims of human rights violations may not be 'pedagogically, emotionally and culturally' prepared to teach human rights values or ready to consider inclusive practices. Educators therefore need a critical mode of introspection that helps to 'decode and deconstruct their own prior perceptions of this reality'. Magendzo argues for an educational atmosphere that is communal and free from 'restraint, authoritarian and rigid relations and environments of non dialogue and poor communication'.

The second example is drawn from an Australian-led international project comprising educators and academics from four conflict-ridden societies (Israel, Palestine, Cyprus and South Africa) in 2004 (Ferreira, 2008:38). Through the sharing of their individual experiences and learnings, the term 'reconciliation pedagogy' (Ferreira, 2008:38) was coined. Reconciliation pedagogy, according to Ferreira (2008:39), refers to the 'generation of knowledges and processes about how, in the culturally complex global realities today, we can all get along'. The project recommends 'research on the inherently pedagogic nature of these [reconciliatory] processes in order that they may be used for wider global use'. Though in its current construction, the term refers to cultural diversity and does not necessarily address reconciliation from a critical pedagogic perspective, the idea of pedagogy to inform reconciliatory processes is appealing in informing global practice. A reconciliation pedagogy would need to focus on issues of valuing diversity and sameness while at the same time problematising othering, assimilation, discrimination and inequality. A key process would be to seek the interconnectedness between people from diverse backgrounds by extracting sameness within diversity. This pedagogy would need educators and learners to reconcile with themselves by critically analysing their own experiences, emotions, values and perspectives of diversity and sameness.

Within the confines of these examples, a global approach to social reconciliation in education would require teachers to utilise critical constructivist skills such as critical introspection, interpretation and evaluation to inform genuine reconciliatory approaches free from hegemonic influences. Mamdani, cited in Enns (2007:14), argues for 'the need to reconcile the logic of reconciliation with that of justice'. A reconciliation pedagogy embedded purely in a dialogical approach without action is bound to cheapen global practice of learning to live together in peace. Magendzo's (2005:140) remedy for this dilemma is to support educators in becoming 'subjects of rights' which can be likened to educators as agents of social reconciliation. He defines such an educator as 'someone with a basic knowledge of the fundamental rights of people who then applies them in the promotion and defence of his or her own rights and the rights of others' (Magendzo, 2005:341).

**Globalisation, migration and challenges facing educators as adult learners in South Africa**

Educators across racial divides have exercised their constitutional right to teach at schools of their choice. Consequently, the racial composition of educator at schools has changed slightly over the years. Likewise, South African parents and learners no longer restrict themselves to schools based on their geographical location, race or economic circumstances. There are situations where racial demographics of schools have changed dramatically over the past thirty years. For example, in the Western Cape, a number of schools that had an exclusively white learner population now have predominantly black learners with a mainly white staff. But in many cases, the learner-and-teacher racial demographics have remained largely unchanged.

Recent teacher shortages, particularly in Mathematics and Science, have influenced the employment of immigrant teachers, some of whom come from conflict-ridden countries such as Zimbabwe, Sudan, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the absence of accurate and recent statistics on documented and undocumented immigrants, it is difficult to ascertain the exact figures of immigrant children in the country. The Witwatersrand University (UNHCR, 2009) suggests approximately '1, 5 million Zimbabweans, 100 000 people from the Great Horn, 50 000 from the Great Lakes region, 20 000 Angolans and additional numbers from other SADC countries' are in South Africa. While recent studies reflect that most migrants come to South Africa without their families, about 14 to 15% migrate (Forced Migration Studies Programme, 2007) with their children. In addition, a significant number of children enter South African borders as unaccompanied minors. Recent research (CoRMSA, 2008) cites educational opportunities as the third most popular reason offered by migrants and unaccompanied children for coming to South Africa.

Notwithstanding the progress in ensuring multi-cultural and -racial schools, the damage caused by years of exclusion and separateness is evident in the sporadic violence witnessed at learning institutions countrywide. In addition to the country's apartheid legacy, global trends supported by local tendencies show an increase in poverty, a widening economic gap

between poor and the wealthy and growing migration from poor countries. Rogers, cited in Smith (2005:374), warns that these factors are most likely to advance the likelihood of conflict. A study (Forced Migration Studies, 2007) that conducted interviews with immigrant children prior to the 2008 nationwide xenophobic attacks, reported high levels of xenophobic attitudes by educators and learners. In addition, immigrants, both documented and undocumented, complain of resistance by school authorities to accept their admission applications. There are cases of both South African and immigrant learners who have been excluded from schools on the basis of their economic circumstances (Forced Migration Studies, 2007).

The majority of South African educators are wounded healers[3] affected by their lived experiences firstly as learners, then educators of an apartheid-based education system. Similarly, their colleagues from other parts of Africa are also facing hurts from their recent past. Magendzo (2005:138), in relating the experiences of educators in Latin America, puts forward the view that educators exposed mainly to exclusionary environments may not understand the complexities of diversity and as a consequence may be ignorant about dealing with it. Despite nearly thirty years of desegregated schooling in South Africa, attempts at understanding the 'other' may be contaminated by the years of indoctrination, assumptions and stereotypes.

Two recent studies conducted by the Human Science Research Council help to frame issues of diversity, integration and conflict within the context of teacher development. Nkomo and Vandeyar (2008:18) conducted interviews with teachers and learners at nine integrated schools in three provinces to explore best practices in dealing with inclusivity. Hemson's study (2006:10) focuses on the extent to which the Post-graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) at three formerly segregated universities equips teachers for teaching in a heterogeneous context. Both studies reveal that schools are struggling to deal with the challenges of diversity and integration, not only in the classroom but in other social spaces within the school community.

**RECONCILIATION**

Over the past fifty years, reconciliation has become an attractive, peaceful solution to countries seeking to end years of political strife. But reconciliation as a concept is highly contested worldwide (Daly & Sarkin, 2007; IJR, 2004; Smith, 2005; Villa-Vicencio, 2009). Firstly, there are those who negate reconciliation as a necessity for sustainable peace. Others who are in agreement that reconciliation is pivotal in avoiding the resurgence of conflict, differ in their understanding of the concept. Existing literature on reconciliation in South Africa focuses mainly on the political dimension leading to a new political dispensation and directly afterwards, as a means of nation building. There is a scarcity of

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[3] 'Wounded healers', a term coined by Martha Cabera to refer to survivors of human rights atrocities who then play a constructive role in the social reconstruction process during the post conflict era

South African literature on social reconciliation evolving from this political discourse. Perhaps it is because social reconciliation– as understood by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (2003:138-139) – is often blended within 'community transformation or social reconstruction'. Based on the literature, however, it is evident that political reconciliation is a precursor for reconciliation within a social context. Countries transitioning from conflict require a political process on a national level to enable reconciliation which though embedded in political and economic dynamics seeks to bring people together on a social level. In his most recent book, Villa-Vicencio (2009:1) describes political reconciliation as 'the litmus test of a successful political transition and peace endeavour'.

**Political reconciliation**

Proponents who define political reconciliation along cultural and religious such as Tutu (1999:103), and De Gruchy (2002:76) hold similar views to Hay (1998:114), who considers reconciliation as 'when the psyche and memory of the individual is healed through the recovery of human dignity and honour, the repairing relationships and meeting the demands of justice'. According to Tutu, De Gruchy and Hay, truth, forgiveness and justice are central features in the process. Villa-Vicencio (IJR, 2004:6), on the other hand, posits that unlike interpersonal reconciliation, which seeks forgiveness, the intention of political reconciliation is to maximise opportunity for 'sustained and meaningful interaction' which could ultimately lead to acceptable solutions 'not yet at hand'. According to Villa-Vicencio (2004:4), political reconciliation requires 'restraint, generosity of spirit, empathy and perseverance'. In these instances, as opposed to on-going political violence, reconciliatory efforts provide opportunities for former adversaries to deal with the past by acknowledging wrongdoing, seeking compromises and building national unity (IJR, 2004:37).

Mamdani (2000), however, argues that the South African TRC looked at reconciliation through the 'narrow lens' of perpetrators and victims. He argues that if reconciliation is to be durable it would need to be aimed at society (beneficiaries and victims) and not simply at the fractured political elite perpetrators and victims. Cole (2007) supports Mamdani's view by arguing for the evolution of political reconciliation from political protagonists to grassroots levels where ordinary people battle to find each other after a violent past. Reconciliation, as argued earlier by Mamdani and Cole, cannot be limited to political elite, victims and perpetrators. Peaceful co-existence in communities, though anchored by a political transition, requires on-going reconciliatory efforts (IJR, 2004:69-70). To this end, political reconciliatory processes such as the South African TRC are important enablers for on-going social-reconciliatory mechanisms.

**Social Reconciliation**

This research paper draws a distinction between political and social reconciliation. Reconciliation is located largely in its social rather than political context although political reconciliation provides a foundation for social reconciliation to thrive. As opposed to an

assimilatory approach which expects the submission of oppressed groups to the dominant group, a reconciliatory approach from a critical constructivist perspective seeks to embrace constructive, collectively owned mechanisms to resolve conflict in ways that dispels hegemonic thinking and promotes equality.

Social reconciliation can be seen as a process that seeks to mend social relations scarred by politically, economically and socially motivated exclusionary practices through dialogue and practise. At the very least, it encourages constructive platforms for frank, difficult conversations to be held amongst people. However, since the very nature of peaceful co-existence is relational, social reconciliation is worth exploring in its relation to education.

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (2003:47) explains reconciliation as 'evolving into a guiding principle for social justice and interconnectedness', arguing that it is about 'painfully and slowly knitting together divided communities in South Africa'. Kumar (1999:2) explains the concept 'as a process that begins with the adversaries' acceptance of each other's right to co-exist', recognising it as a means of promoting tolerance. According to IJR (2003:49) 'past and present estrangement' hinders the realisation of social reconciliation as exclusionary practices along socio-economic and political lines undermine the rebuilding of social relations. Hay (1998:121) considers social reconciliation as 'restor[ing] connections between public and private worlds, between the individual and the community and between different communities.' It is about addressing the hindrances caused by the 'perceived lack of historical, cultural and geographical common ground' (IJR, 2003) and economic exclusion. At best, Kumar (1999:20-24) values the contribution which social reconciliation can make in promoting non-violent platforms to pursue understanding and healing of past wounds among diverse groups of people.

In short, social relations disrupted by past and present fractures require over and above a political solution and policy intervention, human contact that seeks to address differences through dialogue and remedial action (Daly & Sarkin,2007; Hay,1998; IJR,2003). Hay (1998) argues for the healing of the 'damaged self' and the 'social self' through the recovery of one's human dignity, where meaning, truth and trust are re-established or built. Unlike the political context, the existence of someone as a victim, bystander and perpetrator is not as readily acknowledged or agreed upon in the context of social reconciliation. But these labels, though it may be complex to assign leads to further social estrangement. For example, the xenophobia attacks in local communities turned neighbours into victims, bystanders or perpetrators. In the Masiphumelele[4] community, identifying someone as a perpetrator of xenophobic violence depended on the views leaders and community members held about economic hardships faced by the community. A community member who viewed refugees as people who were taking the jobs of South Africans, regarded perpetrators of xenophobic violence as victims of refugees' entrepreneurship.

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[4] IJR Interviews with community leaders in Masiphumelele in 2008

Hay (1998:25) argues that the social reconciliation process holds different expectations for each of these contexts. IJR (2003:50) argues that such contexts set fertile ground for further social estrangement among community members. Neighbours are likely to become 'social strangers' increasing the potential for fractures to fester to an even greater extent within the community. Hay (1998:129) identifies three key dynamics in social reconciliation processes: remembering, engaging and remedying. IJR (2007) in its literature on community healing as a social reconciliation strategy highlights four key pillars: acknowledgement of the past, listening to the each other, empowering each other and the forging of partnerships. Theoretically, several dimensions within the social-reconciliatory process find resonance in critical constructivist thinking and adult learning theory. Daly and Sarkin (2007:42) argue that reconciliation becomes purposeful when it is regarded as a process that is not static but constantly evolving. Further linkages with critical theory and critical hermeneutics are evident in the process which is constantly mindful of how political influence and dominance can derail reconciliatory efforts. In addition, the participation of the reconciler is not separate from the knowledge production process. Reconciliation by its very nature seeks to counter oppressive relations which breed injustices. Social reconciliation in the classroom and broader school community requires stakeholders who are mindful of how diversity and sameness can lead to social estrangement and exclusion creating opportunities for simmering tensions to explode into open confrontation.

**Social reconciliation and dialogue in a globalising school community**

Social reconciliation as in the case of political reconciliation relies on dialogue between those with diverging views on issues that has led to conflict or divisive behaviour. IJR (2003:70) identifies communication as a central feature in reconciliatory strategies. In this regard, Kumar (1999: 10) identifies reciprocal dialogue and co-operative action as key objectives in the design of social reconciliation activities. Slotte (2004) highlights the relational nature of dialogue and emphasises the need for 'a trustful turning towards each other is what is needed for dialogue to come true'. He draws the distinction between 'dialogue as communication about' and 'dialogue as a communication with'.

Within the context of the school, the educator as a school leader who relies on 'dialogue as a communication with' is a key driver to improve effective school leadership. Young (2003:348) argues that there is a greater potential for dialogue about diversity and sameness to be 'difficult,' 'awkward' and 'uncomfortable' in racially or culturally diverse settings or in cases where the identity of the educator differs from that of the learners. Under these circumstances, Young believes that dialogue is difficult because it 'heightens an awareness of personal vulnerability'. According to Young (2003:350), educators may 'themselves feel vulnerable because they don't know when to be the expert and when to let go, when to refer to their own identity and when to refer to cognitive content'. Young (2003:349) suggests that people often avoid difficult dialogues 'for fear of creating

discomfort, embarrassment or hostility', which indicates an unwillingness of society to acknowledge diversity issues.

Villa Vicencio (2009:82) warns that not all dialogue necessarily leads to reconciliation, nor is reconciliation an 'automatic' outcome of dialogue. Similarly, Magendzo (2005:194) points out that an integrated community does not necessarily lead to a reconciled community. Integration, according to Magendzo (2005:211), may contribute towards a reconciled community or 'fuel resentment' when the power dynamics rests in the hands of the dominant members of a community. Dialogue in this regard, even within the context of the classroom, can become 'unproductive' because there is an unwillingness to critically reflect and acknowledge one's own biasedness or stereotypical behaviour. Young (2003:348) states that the emotional response to difficult dialogues ranges from 'mild to mean, these exchanges have the potential for serious polarisation, in which the educational process comes to a standstill'. Young (2003:351) highlights four key indicators of successful dialogue under difficult settings: Firstly, when learners are able to link their thinking and knowledge about the topic to their emotional responses. The knowledge production process has enabled the learners to critically reflect on the validity of their emotional responses against the backdrop of the knowledge they may hold or gained in the process. A second success indicator is when learners gain respect for themselves and each other to the extent that dialogue does not become threatening, harmful or destructive. Learners are able to communicate freely, in a respectful manner with each other. Another indicator is when learners are able to discuss topics which would normally be viewed as contentious. Young highlights the need for learners to take bold steps to 'ask questions, listen carefully and speak honestly. Lastly, when learners are able to recognise and acknowledge their own vulnerabilities, they are more open to gaining a better understanding or enabling others to understand their perspectives. She stresses that the 'urge to speak genuinely' often emerges when learners need to be understood is greater than the need to protect their viewpoints.

Young's model (2003:352) for what she calls 'multicultural inquiry' is helpful in directing dialogue as a social-reconciliatory approach. Four elements guide her model: creating a climate for inquiry, focusing on cognitive and emotional inquiry and developing skills for mindful listening (Young, 2003, 356). These elements are located in a critical constructivist perspective of knowledge production with an integral part of the process engaged in the learner gaining a critical social consciousness. The learners are encouraged to think carefully about the kind of questions they would want to pose with the emphasis not on the answers but rather on the process of inquiring. Young (2003:353) explains cognitive inquiry in her model as investigating 'the underlying contexts and assumptions that shape its knowledge base. Knowledge that help learners to understand 'differences in values, attitudes, beliefs and communication norms among ethnic, national, racial and gender and the effects of economic scarcity or abundance on human development and behaviour' (Young, 2003: 353) will help the learner and teacher to confront stereotypical views and misperceptions about

the 'other'. In this way, finding sameness and common ground through the links gained during the dialogue will enable learners and educators to see the 'other' differently.

In dealing with the emotional inquiry in her model, Young cites Goleman's view (2003:353) that cognitive and emotional intelligence are interdependent. She warns that emotional reactions can undermine 'cognitive goals' highlighting the need for learners to gain skills in how to identify and acknowledge their and others' feelings as part of learning how to process emotions in a constructive way. Lastly, Young emphasises the need for 'mindful listening' which entails listening to the 'other' in a focused, non-judgemental manner that is coupled with 'gentle inquiry' and noticing of the learner's own emotions and behaviours. Dialogue underpinned by the process of rigorous, critical knowledge production is a key driver for social reconciliation which presents an opportunity to contribute towards conflict-sensitive communities.

# SECTION 3: RESEARCH AND DESIGN METHODOLOGY

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

The research question is: To what extent does the ACE School Leadership Programme prepare and equip school leaders for their task as agents of reconciliation? This research utilises a qualitative case study research design and is conducted from a critical constructivist perspective. Hoepfl (1997:47) refers to qualitative research as 'phenomenological inquiry' which uses 'a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand the phenomena in context specific settings.' Qualitative research acknowledges that the complexities and dynamics attached to social realities can better be understood through the lens of those situated in the social world the researcher is investigating (Hoepfl, 1997; Bryman, 2008). Pandit (2005:28) in his research on the experiences of Chinese learners in South Africa regards the qualitative approach to research as a method that 'allows the researcher to 'tell the story' from the participant's viewpoint, providing rich descriptive detail that places quantitative results into its human context'.

As a qualitative researcher, I needed to be closely involved with the situational context of the participants' realities in order to understand their experiences and construct meaning in relation to the academic programme I was researching. I found the knowledge I gathered about the community in which the school was located very beneficial to the research process, especially during the interviewing. Informal conversations with people from the community enhanced my ability to probe participants during the interviewing process. Patton, cited in Golafshani (2003:600), refers to the 'researcher as the instrument' whose efforts and abilities define the credibility of the research. In this regard, the qualitative interviewing is a natural fit for researching how school leaders have implemented their learnings since graduating from the ACE. It presents opportunities to investigate existing and emerging theories regarding key constructs such social reconciliation, conflict sensitivity within the context of local and global schooling.

### Research site: ACE School Leadership Programme

The unit of analysis in this research is the ACE School Leadership Programme and the graduate participants. Registered at NQF level 6, the programme was piloted as a two-year national qualification at higher education institutions accredited by the National Education Department and the Council for Higher Education in 2008. The programme, earmarked for school management teams, is aimed at developing highly skilled and knowledgeable school leaders who are able to lead and manage schools effectively given the current education transformational climate. Admission requirements include a teaching qualification (with an NQF level 6) with a minimum of three years of experience, employment in a management position and a selection process. Relaxed conditions applied to principals and deputy principals currently in the employ of the Education Department with a teaching qualification at NQF Level 5.

Social transformation features pertinently in the fundamental, additional, core and elective modules of the ACE. Issues regarding conflict resolution, inclusion and diversity are discussed in all the modules but to a larger degree in Modules 1 and 3. In Module 1, *Understand School Leadership and Management in the South African Context*, two specific outcomes contribute towards educators as adult learners gaining a deeper understanding of transformation both nationally and locally within the confines of their specific contexts. In Module 3, *Lead and manage people,* the focus is on how school leaders as adult learners can learn how to lead and manage in democratic ways. One of the specific outcomes in this module is dedicated to 'creating an environment conducive to collective bargaining, collaboration and negotiation (and conflict resolution).' However, it should be emphasised that the aims, particularly regarding social transformation, are operative in all modules through the specific outcomes and curriculum content.

The Department of Education's course outline (2007) adopts nine learning principles which 'underpin the teaching and assessment of the programme work:

- Directed and self-directed learning in teams and clusters
- Site-based learning (dependent on the content)
- Variety of learning strategies, i.e. lectures, practice and research portfolios, among others
- Parallel use throughout of individual and group contexts of learning
- Problem-focused deliberation and debate in group context
- Critical reflection on group processes and group effectiveness, critical reflection and reporting on personal growth and insights developed
- Research and experimentation'.

Collectively, these learning principles are intended to ensure that the roles and the applied competencies (norms) as outlined in the NSE are covered in the qualification.  In the same vein, these learning principles tie the participants as units of analysis (in their own right) to the programme. Since the ACE is designed with practice-based learning in mind, the learning process does not always take place in the classroom with the lecturer as the facilitator. I have taken into account that the participants' responses to questions would encompass their experiences in a range of learning settings and may not be bound to the time-frames of the programme. In addition, the participants were assessed on grounds of applied competence. They were expected, according to the course outline (Department of Education, 2007g) to 'demonstrate and provide evidence of practice' through assessment activities such as 'case studies, problem-solving assignments, practice in simulated and in situ contexts, projects, written and oral presentations'. The course outline refers to the educators as agents of change and while the philosophical understanding might not have social reconciliation in mind, the programme acknowledges the agency of school leaders to contribute towards social change. The link between critical constructivism, adult learning

and reconciliation in this research is embedded in the process of learning how to manage conflict and diversity.

Merriam (1998) raises two drawbacks regarding the qualitative interviewing. Firstly, interviews are time-consuming and costly. The volume of data to be gathered, captured, transcribed, analysed and stored is huge and there is a possibility that information can be lost in the capturing and transcribing process. Secondly, it results in detailed reports that are cumbersome to read and may not be relevant to the research. The information could be exaggerated or oversimplified.

Williams, cited in Bryman (2008:392), argues in defence that qualitative research can produce a measure of generalisation by generating findings that have recognisable features which can be compared or linked to similar instances. He coins the term 'moderatum generalisation' in this regard. I hold the view that the research findings may hold a measure of generalisability or transferability since the course outline, modules and the implementation guide were collectively developed by the Department of Education, three Higher Education Institutions (University of Fort Hare, University of South Africa and University of Stellenbosch) along with the personnel from other universities, unions and learning institutions. 'Moderatum' generalisation could at the very least be applied to the three universities that played an instrumental role in the development of the course material.

## DATA COLLECTION, RECORDING AND STORAGE

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were mostly used with a sample of graduates now managing schools with a diverse racial, ethnic and/or nationality learner-teacher population. Two participants were interviewed telephonically due to time constraints. One of the participants preferred completing the interview guide in writing. I followed up with a telephonic interview to confirm the responses. During all these interviews, I took verbatim notes of the responses. With the exception of the two telephonic interviews, all the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Two interviews could not be transcribed due to mechanical failure of the recording device.  In addition to what Hoepfl (1997:50) calls 'human instruments' of data, documents such as course outline and modules were relied upon to both inform the interviewing process and confirm the thick description provided by the participants.

### Sampling procedure

Participants were selected using purposive sampling criteria. Purposeful sampling intentionally draws the selection of the participant to the research question (Bryman 2008: 458) for the sole purpose of maximising the potential of gaining concrete data. The advantage of purposeful sampling is, according to Hoepfl (1997:51), its ability to identify

'information-rich cases which can be studied in depth'. Representation along social context, race, gender and school type are criteria that I took into account.

The higher education institution provided the list of registered adult learners including contact details of their respective schools. According to the list, the population consisted of 23 black Coloured, 15 black Africans and three white learners. I started by ranking a list of 16 learners who fitted the representation criteria. From this list, 10 learners qualified as participants on the basis that they completed the programme by 2010. Contactability and availability were other equally important factors taken into account. Consequently, only one white learner and three Black Africans were placed on the list. One learner did not regard himself as a black Coloured and referred to himself as Khoisan.

Women were in the minority within a racial and gender context in the population and sample. This factor ultimately influenced the equitable representation of the sample. I purposely selected learners who were principals during their studies or who were appointed in principal positions after completion of the ACE. Two participants were recently promoted as circuit managers. Eight participants who met all the criteria consented to the interviews. The ninth participant was a deputy principal. Given the fact that none of the other participants who were principals at the time of their studies were willing to consent to an interview, I selected a deputy principal who, in the absence of the principal, assumes the role of acting principal. I was not overly concerned about the concession, since selection criteria for the ACE includes deputy principals.

One of the main criteria was that the participants should ideally come from schools where recent conflict situations presented the opportunity for the adult learners to implement their knowledge and skills acquired through the ACE. Most of the schools are located in communities that have experienced conflict or tensions stemming from sameness or diversity. I used xenophobia as one of the key social phenomena in this regard. The extent to which xenophobia exists within the specific community varies between sporadic to continuous incidents of xenophobia-related violence.

**The participants**

Following initial telephonic contact, letters were emailed to the participants explaining the research and detailing their expected role. Most participants preferred to be interviewed at their respective schools. One of the participants was withdrawn from the sample after he confirmed that he had not completed the course. This participant played a crucial role in the piloting of the interview guide which led not only to significant changes to the final interview guide but also to how the interview should be conducted.

Upon reflecting on the pilot interviews, I became aware that the participants' responses may be guarded or defensive due to a perception that their performance might be questioned. I realised that some of the questions would require an explanation or an

example to enable the participant to answer the questions adequately. These observations helped raise my awareness of the skills and attitudes required as an interviewer.

**Semi structured interviews**

Interviewing provided an opportunity to gain data that reflect the participants' personal views on the academic programme and concepts, the experiences in implementing their learning, their problems and solutions with regard to their role as agents of social reconciliation. A key learning during the pilot interviews was the need for participants to 'unburden' themselves regarding the difficulties they face in dealing with conflict. I took this factor into account as I prepared for the next interviewing phase. With the exception of four interviews, all interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The interactive process of analysing the data often collided with data collection (Dey, 2005: 38). During the interviews, I took brief notes and after the interviews I wrote down my reflections of each interview. Bryman (2008:447) emphasises the importance of listening to 'what the interviewee is saying or even not saying'. Drawing on critical constructivist thinking, I found the reflection on what was often not said useful to jot down after the interviews. I transcribed most of the interviews myself in order to maximise my reflective processes, linking this to the notes I wrote directly after the interviews. Bryman (2008:451) notes that while transcribing is consumes one's time, it does enhance the credibility of the research.
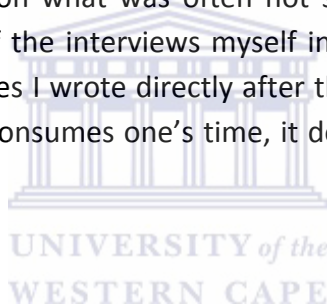
**The interview guide**

The research instrument was initially tested to facilitate a process of refining questions based on the responses. Two participants were interviewed during the piloting of the interview guide. According to Kvale (cited in Bryman, 2008:445), nine types of questions was a useful guide in refining the interview guide which was then divided into four sections to collectively cover the main research question and the eight sub-questions.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

I relied on narrative analysis to inform my approach to analysing the data. As Dey (2005:40) eloquently puts it: 'we tell a story about data, and use a range of techniques – such a summarising events, focusing on key episodes, delineating roles and characters, setting out chronological sequence— to construct an illuminating narrative.' Reisman, cited in Bryman (2008:553), identifies four models of narrative analysis. I have focused in particular on thematic analysis of narratives which, according to Bryman (2008:554), is primarily 'an emphasis on what is being said rather than how'.

The data were organised according to emerging themes, patterns and trends. It required reflection and discernment on what is viewed as important, what is perceived as learnings and what should be shared as findings. Similar to the view of Bryman (2008:538), I found

that data analysis does not necessarily begin after data collection. During the piloting of the interview guide and after the first two interviews, I began analysing the data, particularly in relation to the course material. The visits to schools helped deepen my understanding of the context of each participant. Dey (2005:33) puts forward the relevance of context in constructing meaning from the thick description, positing that it is a 'means of situating action and of grasping its social and historical import'.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

Given the political and social sensitivities of this study, strict confidentiality with specific reference to interview recordings and the findings was maintained. Care has being taken to ensure that no institution of learning, interviewee or school community was cast in a way that would be harmful. The identity of interviewees was protected by the use of pseudonyms in the data analysis as a means of protecting their right to anonymity. Records will be kept in a safe storage place for a period of five years.

In developing my research process, I have taken all the standard ethical requirements of qualitative research into consideration. The participants are in the employ of the WCED. Permission to conduct the research with the educators was approved by the Education Department on condition that the participants consented to the interviews. An ethical consideration was the voluntary participation of graduates as interviewees. The research process was explained to the interviewees to order for them to provide informed consent. Interviewees were given the right to decline the invitation, even after consenting. They were able to refuse to answer any question with which they felt uncomfortable and they had the right to gain access to the recordings and transcriptions of the interview.

## TRUSTWORTHINESS

The quality of this research is measured according to Guba and Lincoln's constructivist-based research design criteria, trustworthiness and authenticity (1994:114). Unlike quantitative and certain qualitative researchers who measure the quality of their research according to reliability and validity, Guba and Lincoln (1994:114) argue instead for research-design criteria which acknowledge that multiple versions of social reality and truth are possible (Cresswell & Miller, 2000:105; Bryman, 2008:377). Guba and Lincoln (Cresswell & Miller, 2000: 106) recognise the role and contribution of the participants as central to measuring the worth of the research.

Trustworthiness, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994:114), has four key elements: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility of this research is tested through respondent validation, which entails providing the participants with the recordings of their interviews and the findings of the research to validate. Criticism against this technique is based on whether the participant has the ability to maintain an unbiased,

objective perspective. Others cited in Bryman, 2008: 378 question whether a 'respondent can validate a researcher's analysis....'.

Triangulation is therefore an additional technique that can be relied upon to remedy the difficulties that may arise from respondent validation. I relied upon the learning material of various modules and the course outline to cross-check the data provided in the interviews and subsequent findings. The in-depth interviews increased the potential for transferability.

All documents used during the selection process of participants, interview notes, recordings, field notes, summaries, email correspondence were stored safely to enable an audit by other researchers at any time. Guba and Lincoln (1994:115) suggest an auditing approach to test the dependability or 'merit' of the research and its findings. Lastly, the outcome of such an audit can be used to measure the confirmability which Lincoln and Guba, cited in Bryman (2008:379), relied upon to evaluate the worth of the research.

# SECTION 4: DATA ANALYSIS

## INTRODUCTION

This section analyses the main findings of the research question: To what extent did the ACE School Leadership Programme prepare and equip school leaders for their task as agents of social reconciliation? I draw on the linkages between the responses of the participants and the literature as an analytical means to understanding whether the ACE School Leadership Programme has made a contribution towards school leaders becoming agents of social reconciliation. In the following two sub-sections, The participants and The programme's aims and the participants' learnings, I discuss the data through the lens of critical constructivism. Proponents of critical construction view it as a theory of learning which expects the school leader as an adult learner to critically construct knowledge through a rigorous process of constructing, analysing and interpreting from multiple perspectives. Knowledge, according to critical constructivists, is constructed within social contexts because the school leader is a social being.

## THE PARTICIPANTS

### The participants as school leaders

All the participants interviewed were South Africans in school leadership roles. Of the nine participants, four were women and five men. Six participants were principals, one was a deputy principal and two were former principals currently responsible for the management of principals.

Table A: Breakdown of the sampling in terms of race, gender and school type

| Black African | | | Black Coloured | | | White | | | Primary School | LSEN[5] School | High School | WCED[6] officials | Total No. of Participants |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M | F | | M | F | | M | F | | | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | **3** | 3 | 2 | **5** | 1 | 0 | **1** | 2 | 1 | 4 | 2 | **9** |

The departmental officials' responses were mainly based on their experiences as principals at the time of their studies. One of the six principals was a deputy principal at the time of registration for the programme. The age of the participants ranged between 40 to 60 years. All the participants had over 15 years of service with the WCED but fewer years of experience specifically as principals or deputy principals.

The participants were most likely educated and taught under conditions of apartheid where the educational system was the 'perpetrator' of conflict (Novelli and Cardozo, 2008:479).

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[5] LSEN means 'learners with special educational needs'.
[6] The WCED officials were principals at primary schools prior to their promotion.

Drawing on the views of Magendzo (2005:141), who argues that given the political past of Chile, Chilean educators may find it difficult to practise a critical pedagogical approach to inclusivity, I acknowledge that the participants too may have similar challenges. Given Magendzo's (2005:141) findings that Chilean educators may not be 'pedagogically, emotionally and culturally prepared' to teach in heterogeneous settings, I recognised the challenges that the participants and the ACE would experience in preparing and equipping school leaders as agents of social reconciliation if a critical constructivist approach is not utilised in the programme. Conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation as values may be difficult to adopt if educators are not emotionally or culturally prepared. Kincheloe (2008:43) argues that the knower (the participant as the school leader) would need to produce 'critical constructions' of the school context and at all times be mindful of his or her own identities as a person in power. By implication, the extent to which the programme can prepare participants would be limited and dependant to how the participant views his or her role as an agent of social reconciliation.

**The participants in relation to the context of their school communities**

The context of the participants' school community had a bearing on the ACE's ability to prepare and equip the participants for their role as agents of social reconciliation. Each of the participants was situated in communities where a range of complexities exist. Critical constructivists argue that knowledge is produced in social and historical contexts and therefore is subjective. The contexts within which school leaders work cannot be separated from the way in which school leaders' perform their task as agents of social reconciliation.

The following is a brief synopsis of each participant's context:

Lindiwe is a black African female primary school principal in Khayelitsha. The school caters for learners whose mother-tongue is Sesotho. According to Lindiwe, the school is surrounded by taverns that operate during school hours. Before the school was built, the local soccer clubs used the land for sports recreation. Although the learners were not involved in the xenophobic attacks that occurred in the community, learners and teachers were affected by its impact. The school has immigrant learners and teachers. Conflict fault-lines arise between different racial and ethnic groups in the community, language diversity, gender-based violence, substance abuse and taxi rivalry.

Maliwe is a black African male high school principal in Khayelitsha. The learner composition comprises black Africans, with Xhosa, Zulu and Sesotho ethnic groups. There are no immigrant learners or teachers at the school. During the xenophobic violence in 2008, a faction of learners was involved in attacking immigrants in their community. Conflict stems from gang violence, poverty and among teachers, the filling of promotion posts.

Nozuko is a black African female former primary school principal in Khayelitsha. At the time of her tenure as principal, the learner and teacher population at the school was Xhosa-

speaking black African. Learner-on-learner violence was highlighted as one of the main sources of conflict at the school. Interpersonal conflict between teachers and poor teacher and parent relations were listed as barriers affecting social harmony at the school.

Johan is a white male former primary school principal in Kuils River. According to the participant, the school, situated in a middle-class community, experienced an exodus of white Afrikaans-speaking learners over the past two decades when it began enrolling black learners. Immigrant learners are registered at the school. Conflict or tensions stem from racial relations, language diversity, and competition between schools. From time to time, the school experienced tensions between parents and teachers. In recent years, the school has employed teachers of colour.

Paul is a black Coloured male primary school principal in Delft. The school is situated in a poor racially mixed community. It has immigrant learners but not teachers. Both learner and teacher composition comprises black African and Coloured South Africans. According to the participant, a growing number of learners belong to the Rastafarian faith.

Clive is a black Coloured male high school principal in Delft. The participant regards himself as a Khoisan rather than black Coloured South African. According to the participant, learners are mainly Khoisan but the school has registered black Africans and immigrant learners. During the 2008 xenophobic attacks, the school was a refuge to displaced immigrants. Lines of conflict and tensions are caused by party political factions, the housing crisis, gang violence, unemployment, learner-on-learner violence, personal differences among teachers, strained relations between parent and teachers, and vandalism.

Keith is a black Coloured male high school deputy principal in Macassar. The school has black South African (Coloured and African) and immigrant learners whose mother-tongue languages are English, Afrikaans, French, Xhosa and Zulu. The teachers are mainly black Coloured. One white teacher teaches at the school. There are no black African teachers at the school. According to the participant, the community experienced xenophobic violence. Tension in the community is caused by diverging political views, gang violence and poverty. The school has problems with learner-on-learner violence.

Martha is a black Coloured female, LSEN school principal in Strand. According to the participant, learners come from diverse racial and socio economic groups and have intellectual learning challenges. In recent years, more white learners have enrolled at the school because it is affordable. Transport is provided by the school for the learners. The school attracts learners from the surrounding informal settlements. Conflict and tension relating to unemployment, the housing crisis, gender-based violence, xenophobia and taxi rivalry is rife within the communities which the school serves.

Linda is a black Coloured female high school principal in Belhar. The learner composition is mainly black Coloured, with black African and immigrant learners in the minority. Until

recently, Afrikaans was the dominant language of instruction. The majority of learners do not live in the immediate vicinity but commute to school from neighbouring communities. The teacher composition is black Coloured. Gang violence and substance abuse are contributors to conflict and tension experienced at the school. Interpersonal conflict between teachers is a common occurrence at the school.

These contexts require that the participants are prepared and equipped to view contexts as contested spaces where uncritical knowledge about the 'other' may lead to exclusionary practises (Hemson, 2006; Kincheloe, 2008), particularly if the values of conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation are not embraced by the participants and therefore stunt the potential for social change. Similarly, it serves as a reminder that the school leader as a participant and the programme may not have absolute control over school community contexts and may face external constraints in executing their task as agents of social reconciliation. The likelihood that conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation values may not be accepted by the rest of the school community is a factor that must be taken into account. In addition, the participant may face restrictions imposed by the Education Department as the employer.

**The school population, the participants and the ACE School Leadership Programme**

The data suggested that in recent years most of the participants' school communities changed in terms of race, nationality, ethnicity and language of learners and to a lesser degree in terms of teachers' racial composition. The schools are not racially inclusive. At two schools (Martha's and Johan's schools), the learner composition included minute pockets of white learners. Black African and Coloured learners were the main racial groups at four schools. Three schools had a learner composition that consisted solely of one racial group. Immigrant learners were registered at seven of the nine schools. White teachers were in the employ of three of the nine schools (those of Keith, Johan and Martha). Nozuko's former school as well as Linda and Maliwe's schools employed teachers of one racial group. The other schools had black African and Coloured teachers. Lindiwe and Clive's schools employed immigrant teachers.

Table B: Change in learner and teacher composition over the past ten years[7]

| Description | Number of schools indicating change in learner composition | Number of schools indicating change in teacher composition |
|---|---|---|
| Race[8] | 6 | 6 |
| Gender | 1 | 0 |
| Nationality[9] | 6 | 2 |
| Ethnicity[10] | 9 | 0 |
| Language | 7 | 2 |

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[7] Statistics based on responses from interviews with the participants
[8] Race refers to white, black Coloured, black Indian, black African
[99] Nationality refers to South African and other nationalities
[10] Ethnicity refers to black African in terms of Zulu, Xhosa, Venda, Sotho, Tswana

Seven schools were affected by xenophobia. Of the nine schools, six schools had immigrant learners and all schools had accommodated learners from diverse ethnic groups. However, inclusion adopted an assimilatory approach that could undermine conflict-sensitive and social reconciliation values. Learners who spoke a different language or who belonged to a different religious, nationality or ethnic group were expected to fit in with the dominant groups at school. With the exception of two participants who mentioned that they attempted to teach learners about each other's cultures, strategies that would foster integration in meaningful, dignified and respectful ways were not mentioned in the responses of participants.

The ACE places emphasis on legislation and policies regarding social inclusion. All the schools had policies that promoted inclusivity regardless of race, gender, language, religion and other divides. Participants lauded the programme for assisting them in developing or revising school policies to ensure social inclusivity. In this regard, the ACE took significant strides in preparing school leaders through policy formulation to become agents of social reconciliation. However, the data suggest the implementation of the policy has not ensured social inclusion in terms of learner intake, teacher employment, accommodating learners with language vulnerabilities and integrating learners from different ethnic groups and nationalities.

One could argue that school leaders are not in control of parents' decision regarding placement of their children. School leaders are able to influence decision-making regarding the employment of teachers. It may, however, be too soon to expect an increase in the racial composition of teachers at schools given the recent changes to policies. In addition, although school leaders may be able to exert influence over teacher appointments, the process is dependent on other factors out of their control.

However, the data could also signal that the ACE did not focus sufficiently on strategies to ensure that the implementation of policies is an active process of school leaders practising their agency as social reconcilers. Another plausible explanation, given the fact that the participants are recent graduates and may still be in the process of implementing their learnings, could be that the process of engaging with stakeholders such as the governing bodies, teachers, community leaders, and education officials impacts on the participants' ability to make immediate changes.

On the other hand, it could also signal that participants may be reluctant to implement strategies that might promote integration but may be unpopular with dominant groups. In this regard, Kincheloe (2008:50) argues that critical consciousness that shapes rigorous knowledge production requires 'individual agency and will' to fight for those who are powerless and marginalised by the actions of dominant groups'. Agency and willpower would require that the participants practise the values of conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation with vigour. Bentley, Fleury, and Garrison (2007:13) cite fellow critical constructivist, Takacs (2003), who emphasises the need for critical constructions that lead to

the 'emergence of a consciousness and critical intervention in reality'. Policy formulation has to led to activism to ensure that undemocratic, oppressive ideals are transformed.

**THE PROGRAMME'S AIMS AND PARTICIPANTS' LEARNINGS**

The ACE set out to achieve the following aims:

- 'Provide leadership and management to enable schools to give every learner quality education.
- Provide professional leadership and management of the curriculum and therefore ensure that schools provide quality teaching, learning and resources for improved standards of achievement for all learners.
- Strengthen the professional role of principals
- Develop principals who are able to critically engage and be self reflective practitioners
- Enable principals to manage their organisations as learning organisations and instil values supporting transformation in the South African context.' (Department of Education, 2007g)

Based on the data, the theoretical lens, critical constructivism and two values, conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation, from which I investigated the ACE, it is evident that the achievement of the programme's aims was uneven. Certain aims were achieved to a greater extent than others. For example, participants were unanimous regarding the way in which the programme had strengthened their professional roles as school leaders. The data did not enable me conclusively to demonstrate whether the programme contributed towards principals' ability to provide quality education.

Notable gaps flowing specifically from insufficient learning opportunities to gain applied competence in conflict handling through mediation and other conflict resolution mechanisms are evident from the data. As a result, schools leaders have mentioned that they feel ill-prepared or -equipped to deal with their agency as social reconcilers. For the purposes of substantiating my view, I identified policy development and implementation as one example (reflected in the data) that draws out the participants' learnings based on the five aims, the specific outcomes and curriculum content of three modules.

The data are discussed specifically with regards to certain specific outcomes and the curriculum content in the following modules: In Module 1, 'Understand school leadership and management in the South African context', the specific outcome focused on 'demonstrate[ing] a basic understanding of what is involved in school management and leadership in South Africa.' (Department of Education, 2007a) The specific outcome, 'demonstrate the personal and professional qualities necessary for effective management of teaching and learning' and the others found in Module 2 'Managing teaching and learning' (Department of Education, 2007b) addressed the role of the school leader in relation to teaching and learning. Similarly, the specific outcomes in Module 3 'Lead and manage'

(Department of Education, 2007c) provide the school leader with learning opportunities to learn about leadership, management styles and skills. One specific outcome, 'create an environment conducive to collective bargaining, collaboration and negotiation (and conflict resolution) in this module, deals specifically in the curriculum outline with 'managing the external environment' through the lens of conflict management. The emphasis is on labour legislation, managing diversity, and conditions of service, relations with parents and the communities. I discuss the data in relation to the five aims of the ACE.

**Strengthening the professional role of school leaders**

The participants in general viewed the ACE as a positive contribution to the strengthening of their professional role as school leaders. Clive regards the introduction of the ACE as a significant milestone in the country's history. He and others viewed the programme as an unequivocal acknowledgement by the Department of Education that leading and managing schools in the post-apartheid era is a complex task that requires, among other resources, a special kind of school leader. Participants also regarded the introduction of the ACE as the government's acknowledgement of the historical neglect in the provision of academic continuing professional development programmes for principals, particularly principals of colour. From a social reconciliation point of view, the responses of the participants suggest that the programme in itself was viewed an act of redress. Critical constructivists would argue that the recognition by participants of the programme's contribution to their professional role could be seen as a sign of their own critical consciousness in this regard.

> "The 2007/2011 strategic plan of the national Minister of Education spelt out the need for an ACE course, one course to train school managers. In the past, there was no course available to train and equip oneself for the role of school leadership and management. People were promoted on basis of the years of service and they had to make it up as they go long. People developed different strategies to cope with the challenges. However for myself, and I have advocated for a long time for a single course for every principal from the Limpopo to St Helena Island, everyone." (Interview: Clive, September 2011)

The programme has guided school leaders as adult learners by encouraging aspects of critical constructivist thinking as reviewed in the literature. The participants were aware of their strengths but similarly of their shortcomings in their leadership and management styles. Critical constructivist, Kincheloe (2008:43) asserts that knowledge construction should be critical evaluated not only in terms of the learning and teaching but also the product (what is learnt). In order to fulfil the task of evaluating, adult learners would need to critically interpret and understand the process of knowledge construction and its relation to the product. One could define the 'product' as the knowledge constructions that are formed. In the case of the ACE, it could be the learning insights gained from the various modules or a policy formulated as an assignment and later used to inform similar policy formulation processes. There were participants who could critically understand and

evaluate the 'products' that arose out of their leadership and management styles. Johan, in response to a question about how he deals with conflict, identified conflict handling as a learning need:

> "As a principal, I did not want to handle conflict at school. It is something within me. I don't like conflict, handling conflict. I would rather shy away from it." (Interview: Johan, September 2011)

In a similar vein, Lindiwe drew on the learning material in the programme regarding intelligences (IQ, emotional and spiritual intelligences) required to fulfil the role as transformative and participatory leaders:

> "We need to train ourselves in emotional intelligence, especially when we regret how we responded [to a conflict situation]" (Interview: Lindiwe, September 2011)

Lindiwe's emphasis on regretted actions alludes to the fact that social reconciliation as a value may be thought about after critically reflecting on a conflict situation instead of practising conflict sensitivity to prevent such incidents. Lindiwe, Nozuko and Clive, who together have over fifty years of service as school leaders, have no qualms in recommending the programme to their peers:

> "... After the conflict I would encourage the principals to go and study further because the ACE [School Leadership Programme] will help you ..." (Interview: Nozuko, September 2011)

> "I must emphasise that there was a difference in the way the course was presented at UWC, UCT and Stellenbosch. There is a vast difference. The first question that I asked them [the lecturers] is where we pitch this course. Yes, I have a Masters degree but where do I pitch with others in the same class? People who sat with me only had a three-year diploma. [This higher education learning institution] pitched extremely high. We were 52 when we started out; we were eight that finished and a couple more later. But I must say the course did excellent work and I came away thinking, all people should take the course, especially in an unequal society." (Interview: Clive, September 2011)

The data reveal that the participants have reflected on their own perceptions about themselves and what they perceive others to think about them in their professional roles. Paul considers the multiple roles he plays as principal when he meets with parents in his office:

> 'We are sitting with a lot of social problems in this community like drug abuse, alcohol abuse, child abuse, child molesting ... and then poverty, unemployment. As the principal, they [the parents] come to me to explain their problems and I must use my little knowledge of social problems The educators come to me about truant

children ... we go out and fetch those children. We are sitting with learners with learning problems that we need to refer to special schools ...' (Interview: Paul, September 2011)

Similarly, Nozuko shares how she is mindful of the power dynamics within the community and therefore sets boundaries in terms of her professional relationship with community stakeholders:

'You become so cautious to interfere in some of the community's tensions. I have certain limitations when it comes to my role. I need to ensure that the parents are sending their learners to school and I need to ensure that those learners are safe at school.' (Interview: Nozuko, November 2011)

Kincheloe (2008:81) purports that critical constructivism is 'interested in the construction of the self' and how knowledge, particularly about power blocs within social, political and economic contexts impact on such critical constructions. An emphasis on the professional role of principals within the ACE enables learning opportunities for the participants to rethink and reshape notions of the self (Kincheloe, 2008:81) that could lead to the adoption of conflict sensitive and social-reconciliatory values. Kincheloe (2008:82) articulates it as 'we can begin to develop new ways of being human.'

**Provide leadership and management to enable schools to give every learner quality education.**

Social and economic contexts were recognised by the participants as threats to quality teaching and learning. Xenophobia and gang violence affected a large percentage of the schools in the sample. Teachers' perceptions about their working conditions triggered interpersonal conflict while learner-on-learner violence was caused by typical adolescent behaviour. Learners would fight about girlfriends or boyfriends, possessions and petty jealousies. Substance abuse and gangster affiliations were also seen as sources of conflict. Although few participants identified racial and ethnic discord, the responses in general caution against dismissing race as a trigger. In fact, the issues regarding language which in the South Africa context is coupled to issues of race featured pertinently as a source of conflict. Participants recognised conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values as crucial elements in dealing effectively with conflict and its impact on learning and teaching.

According to Kincheloe (2008:28), research has revealed that a large percentage of learning difficulties arise not from 'cognitive inadequacies' but rather from social contexts of learners. He argues that educators need 'a rich understanding of the social backgrounds of students, the scholarly context in which disciplinary and counter-disciplinary knowledges are produced and transformed in subject matter and the political context which helps shape educational purpose'. Through a deep contextual understanding, educators are able to

respond to needs of learners. Kincheloe (2008:28) argues that 'when teachers fail to perform such an act of contextualization, students get hurt'.

In the context of the participants' schools, 'hurt' relates to disempowerment because learners struggle to achieve under such conditions leading to high failure and drop-out rates. Educators who are not able to contextualise their learners' academic progress are not in a position to analyse the pedagogical circumstances fully, which in Kincheloe' view (2008:49) leads to incorrect assumptions about the learners. Instead, from a critical constructivist point of view, educators should develop a 'consciousness of complexity' (Kincheloe, 2008:50) to be able to lead and manage schools that provide quality education to each learner. Simply put, it is not enough for the participants to merely have a pedagogical understanding in order to provide learners with quality education. According to Kincheloe (2008:50), participants who have a 'consciousness of complexity' about the learner's socio-economic realities should adopt conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values in order to provide the learner with quality education.

Table C: Source of conflict and tension in schools according to participants

| Source of conflict or tension | No. of schools affected |
|---|---|
| Relations between different racial groups | 3 |
| Relations between different ethnic groups | 1 |
| Language diversity breeds tension | 4 |
| Xenophobic sentiments | 7 |
| Gender-based violence | 3 |
| Party political tensions | 2 |
| Housing crisis | 2 |
| Gang violence | 4 |
| Teacher strikes and rivalry amongst unions | 0 |
| Unemployment | 3 |
| Taxi rivalry | 2 |
| Vandalism | 3 |
| Tension between teacher and parent | 3 |
| Tension between or amongst teachers | 4 |
| Learner on learner violence | 4 |
| Other: Taverns | 1 |

Johan believes that understanding the context is the first step in resolving the conflict:

'I think we must learn the context. I think it's important to know that this situation is different from that one. So what is the reason for the conflict here? Is it about race, is it about culture, is it about language, is it about, whatever?' (Interview: Johan September 2011)

Johan's view suggests that conflict sensitivity and social-reconciliatory values underpin this thinking. Drawing on Johan's comments, language, for example, impacts on the quality of

education the learner receives. Though language diversity among the learners and teachers was prevalent at all the schools, not all learners received mother-tongue instruction. At schools with predominately black African learners, the dominant language among learners was Xhosa. One school specifically catered for Sesotho-speaking learners. Similarly, at schools with black Coloured learners, English and Afrikaans were dominant languages. Immigrant learners were mostly from Zimbabwe, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The languages (Shona, Ndebele and French) spoken by these learners were not accommodated at the schools. Paul acknowledged that the immigrant learners, especially the French-speaking learners, struggled to communicate in English with their peers and teachers.

Most participants were silent regarding efforts provide learners with mother-tongue instruction or remedial support to learners struggling with a language that is not their mother tongue. Only four participants indicated that language diversity caused conflict within their school communities. I found that language diversity was one area that participants could demonstrate their agency as social reconcilers but did not. For example, when asked to provide examples of how the programme enabled them to increase inclusivity at their schools, not one of the participants referred to remedial plans to accommodate learners whose mother tongue differed from the school's language of instruction. None linked the lack of mother-tongue instruction as an indicator for remedial programmes that would improve the quality of education of these learners. Learners who were not fluent in the language of instruction would therefore struggle to learn in the classroom. From a critical constructivist viewpoint, leading and managing a school with learners whose barrier to learning stems from being taught in a First or Second Additional language would require educators willing to intervene in constructive ways. However, the extent to which school leaders are able to intervene may depend on factors (such as departmental policies, community views, funding) beyond their control.

I asked questions about the impact of the 2008 xenophobic violence on the participants' schools to gain insight regarding the extent to which the learners right to quality education where influenced by the participants' conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation values. Of the nine schools, six have immigrant learners and two have immigrant teachers. Seven schools indicated that xenophobia impacted directly on their schools. When asked about the impact of the violence on learning and teaching, responses differed in terms of aid offered to victims within the school community. Maliwe, Clive, Lindiwe and Linda took an active conflict-sensitive approach:

> "I rushed to the gate when the learners were marching out during school hours. We locked that gate and I stood at the gate facing the learners and telling them not to hurt the foreigners. They call them *makwere, makwere*[11]. Those people helped to

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[11] *Makwere, makwere* is a derogatory term used to refer to immigrants.

liberate us when we were called terrorists by the apartheid government. I told them about our history in Africa. These people are our brothers in Africa." (Interview: Maliwe, November 2011)

"I understand what Africa is all about. I understood the reasons for the foreigners in the country and I understood the situation that the community found themselves in. Strangely enough it was not the people of Khoisan extract that reacted violently towards the foreigners but people, mostly Xhosa, feeling that they [the immigrants] (had) taken their jobs. What I did and why I felt equipped at that stage was because we had spoken about it a lot it at university level and I kept myself abreast of what is happening in country. When the three came to my doorstep because this area is seen as safe area for foreigners, I opened the school's doors. I had a lot of these foreigners staying here during the violence. I opened the schools' doors but because the school only had a limited space I went out the mosque and spoke to the church leaders and among us saw to their food, clothes needs and so on. Incidentally, there are a number of children of those that I helped that are now learners at the school." (Interview: Clive, September 2011)

"I had a Grade 11 girl in my class. She was very bright and the only one in the class who could speak English well, even amongst the South Africans, he English was good. She lived in fear and I spoke to her about dealing with her fear." (Interview: Linda, November 2011)

Lindiwe relates that at the time of xenophobia attacks, two of the teachers were Zimbabwean nationals. She also had immigrant learners at her school. She argues that immigrants felt safe at her school because inclusion was a common practice at her school prior to the violence. She remarks that the Zimbabwean Mathematics and Science teacher continued to volunteer his services after his contract expired at the school. For her it demonstrated the commitment the teacher had towards the school and felt that it was largely due to the levels of acceptance and tolerance at the school. Seemingly, conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values underpinned in Lindiwe's leadership and management style enabled proactive strategies for integration as opposed to reactive remedies. Bentley, Fleury and Garrison (2007:11) would regard Lindiwe's interventions as central to regarding the 'nature of learning, teaching, curriculum and schooling as a socio-political process.'

Most participants had debriefed learners in the classroom and through workshops but none mentioned how the xenophobic violence had influenced their thinking regarding potential policy and institutional changes. The debriefing suggests that the participants' actions are underpinned by conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values. However, the responses also suggest that the depth or extent to which these values have become crucial to daily teaching and learning may not be sufficient in ensuring a proactive response to dealing with conflict. Two participants (Martha and Nozuko) indicated that they were not affected by the

xenophobic violence even though their learners lived in communities where xenophobic attacks were recorded. I found Nozuko's responses strikingly different from the other participants. The following responses to my questions substantiate the latter:

Q: "So if you look at the xenophobia that was happening at that time, did it affect your school?

A: Yes, it did affect us. The community organisations quickly resolved it. We had to dismiss the school because some of their informal houses were burning. It's not easy for me to speak about 2008 because the first of October, I left the school. We did not have learners who are out of South Africa. It's only the [immigrant] shops around the school. So it does not affect us directly. The school created security measures where some of the community volunteers would try to secure the school.

Q: So what sort of advice would you give to principals during the time to help them manage their school?

A: I am just saying to you, the advice on security. Since most of them live in the informal settlements, also to service their fire extensions so if there are any burnings they would be able to protect the school property.

Q: As an adult learner in the ACE School Leadership Programme, what were the learning needs that arose at the time for you in terms of how to handle that violence?

A: Which violence?

Q: The xenophobic violence or any kind of violence. What were your learning needs?

A: When it comes to xenophobia, I think this question is not relevant. As I have told you, I left the school in (the) mid-2008 and I went to the district so I was not so fully involved or affected by xenophobia as an adult learner.

Q: So if you look at the types of violence you spoke of earlier or that your schools where affected by, do you think violence is unique to South Africa? Or do you think that only teachers in South Africa have difficulties in dealing with conflict?

A: It is difficult. First, you need to know the source of the violence, so for me to say how difficult and how I feel, is very much difficult. So we need to check the sources of those cases. It is race on the other side for us as South Africans. You will find that some of them live in poverty and are unemployed and now they feel insecure. To their understanding, they feel that the others, the non-South Africans are taking over their jobs. All of that is out of my context as an adult learner. It does not affect me directly. You become so cautious to interfere in some of the community's tensions. I have certain limitations when it comes to my role. I need to ensure that the parents

are sending their learners to school and I need to ensure that those learners are safe at school. (Interview: Nozuko, November 2011)

Nozuko's responses suggest that school leaders may very well embrace social-reconciliatory and conflict-sensitive values but practise their agency very differently. Nozuko chose to demonstrate her agency through focusing purely on learning and teaching within the physical confines of the school. Her agency may then be practised through the curriculum. In a similar vein, Martha, who has no immigrant learners at her school but whose learners experienced the xenophobic violence, responded in the following way:

A: It [the xenophobia attacks] really does not affect our school because we are not in the area where it happened, but the learners spoke about how they broke into the shops of the people [immigrants] and how they actually helped to take out the people's stuff.

Q: The learners?

A: Ja, picking up chocolates in the street, people running with stuff and they picking it up and it's like a joke for them.

Q: How did you as a school leader manage that process with the learners?

A: We talked to them and said, what if our country was in a crisis and we have to run from our country to their country and make a living there? Those people are trying to make a living here. They are trying to sell, to make a income for them, to assist their family. And they also have kids, wives and parents that they need to help financially. So if you chase them away, if something happens to our country and we run to them, they can also chase us away". (Interview: Martha, October 2011)

Martha and Nozuko's comments could signal that the participants and ACE may need a deeper sense of 'consciousness of complexity' (Kincheloe, 2008: 30) in order to recognise that 'things that appear isolated and fixed are parts of larger, ever-changing processes.' A 'consciousness of complexity' would enable a critical constructivist educator to recognise that more than one interpretation of a reality exists. Kincheloe (2008:31) puts forward the idea that such educators would have greater awareness of the ambiguity and uncertainty coupled to the presence of multiple interpretations and therefore have opportunities (informed by such complexities) to intervene in the classroom, school and community.

Other than the immediate humanitarian response to the xenophobic violence, it was not clear whether the social and economic context of immigrants were fused into learning programmes, assessment and moderation, classroom practice and school governance matters. Ziegahn (2007) has argued that migration provides an opportunity for growth and conflict. I noted that where 'othering' was visible in the knowledge production of the participants, the opportunity for conflict-sensitive approaches through social reconciliation

was lost. Similarly, critical constructivists Bentley, Fleury and Garrison (2007), and Kincheloe (2008) maintain that knowledge production is defined by social, political and economic contexts and consequently, constructed in a very subjective manner.

Through the responses, I witnessed how education which serves the purpose of building national unity, patriotism and economic entitlement can promote 'othering' (Smith, 2005, Waghid, 2009). Magendzo (2005:140) warns that educators may in fact not be capable of 'recognising the legitimate other', which became evident to me when analysing the responses of Nozuko and Martha. Whether the participants were consciously aware of how their identity shaped the positions they took and how it – given the power dynamics at hand – influenced teaching and learning at their school could not be clearly established. The responses, however, illustrate that the school leader as a person with authority and power influences the school community's knowledge construction about the 'other'. Interestingly both Martha and Nozuko's schools did not have immigrant learners or teachers as opposed to the other participants. But as with Martha, the common approach dealing with xenophobia was through classroom interventions.

**Provide professional leadership and management of the curriculum and therefore ensure that schools provide quality teaching, learning and resources for achievement for all learners**

I asked the participants how conflict affected their ability to provide quality teaching and learning and if conflict impacted on teaching and learning, how they dealt with it. They were asked to link conflict to the modules in the ACE.

*School leaders, conflict sensitivity and the ACE School Leadership curriculum*

According to the participants, understanding conflict was not as great a learning difficulty as knowing how to handle it in constructive ways. Participants differed in their views regarding the extent to which the learning material addressed conflict and its relevance to quality learning and teaching. Clive and Nozuko felt that conflict was covered extensively throughout the modules, particularly in the kinds of questions posed, in the case studies and the reading material. Contrary to these views, Lindiwe and Martha indicated that although the modules often created an awareness of factors that could trigger conflict and through the group exchanges one could learn how to handle conflict, no module specifically tackled from a practical point of view how conflict could be handled sensitively. Kincheloe (2008:43) puts forward the idea that critical constructions should provide 'a richer insight into a phenomenon'. I learnt that the divergent views demonstrated that participants thought deeply and critically about the ACE's ability to contribute towards their realities. In this regard, I realised that from a critical constructivist perspective, the issue at hand was not merely the theoretical reflections gained from the ACE itself, but rather its ability to encourage participants to utilise their insights as catalysts to advocate for change within the school community.

Policy formulation and implementation was regarded as a conflict-sensitive approach because its purpose was to avoid conflict from arising and, in the event of such an incident, policy that would provide guidance on the moral high ground would be preferred. The participants agreed unanimously that the learning materials on legislation with its links to leadership and management strengthened their skills in policy writing and implementation, which in turn contributed towards their management of the curriculum. However, few participants reflected on how current experiences and changing contexts as a consequence of sameness and differences influenced the on-going revision of school, national and provincial policies.  Although participants could expound on how policies were used as conflict preventative measures, conflict that arose from contraventions of policies presented new learning needs.  This could be due to the limited interviewing time. Responses from Nozuko, Maliwe and Linda demonstrate how on the one hand, policies have been helpful to reduce conflict, but on the other, may not have brokered sustainable peace:

> "The programmes that help me were based on the school governing body. The conflict I experienced with the governing body and what it caused with the staff, where the governing body wants to interfere in the role of the management. That created conflict with the staff. The ACE course helped ..." (Interview: Nozuko, November 2011)

> "When I was deputy principal at the school, there was no leadership at the school and it caused major problems. There were cliques at the school, favouritism, back-biting, especially after internal moderation and conflict about how promotion posts are being filled. We had no policies, now they are in place." (Interview: Maliwe, November 2011)

> "The difficulties are transformative in nature. There are teachers who are unwilling to accept change. They are accustomed to doing things the traditional way. As a newly appointed principal at the school, I struggle with teachers who are not prepared to do things differently. And of course in their view, management must take the blame for everything that goes wrong. As far as I am concerned, it is about quality education, that's what I want." (Interview: Linda, November 2011)

> "The skills I got helped, for example with school moderation. Internal moderation which is supposed to be done in school can really help to reduce the conflict because you find the teachers will be fighting (at the) beginning of the year about the quality of learner they were getting from the previous class. So now I was able to advise the principals to do internal moderation and be able to analyse the results each and every term so that they can be able to pick up on any challenges that may cause conflict."  (Interview: Nozuko, November 2011)

The four responses mentioned above, relate to conflicts experienced by the participants either with parents or teachers and highlight the level of the school leaders' critical

consciousness about their role as managers of the curriculum in relation to the school community. When examining these conflicts, three important realities emerge. Firstly, the conflicts illustrate how curriculum matters can cause estrangement. Secondly, that the school leader can be either the victim or perpetrator, and if neither description fits, then the mediator of the conflict. Lastly, conflict management is a collective responsibility.

Evidently, the ACE programme has enabled school leaders to put much-needed policies in place. Maliwe, Nozuko and Clive strengthened their transformative and participatory leadership skills during the consultative processes which demonstrate the implementation of social-reconciliatory and conflict-sensitive values. But policy implementation has its limitations in conflict resolution. The potential that policy might in itself evoke conflict is also apparent in these responses. Participants reflected on their own roles in dealing with conflict, including their relations towards others. Maliwe mentioned how he was able to use policy development as a means to heal strained staff relations. His colleagues may view his perspective differently. In these responses, the potential for the school leaders' own perceptions of the 'other' to cause further estrangement between stakeholders is very real. Whether the school leader is the mediator, victim or perpetrator of the conflict, handling the conflict will require reconciliatory pedagogy (Ferreira, 2008; Magendzo, 2005) which I refer to in the Literature Review.

### School leaders, identity and managing teaching and learning

The school leader's identity as a figure of authority will influence conflict handling. People have multiple identities (Hall, 2003:22) which in my view often compete with one another. Being a school leader is only one dimension of the participants' multiple identities that shape their agency. Kincheloe (2008:10) argues that power relations are influenced by identity and consequently knowledge construction is not void of these influences. How school leaders perceive altercations is influenced by the power dynamics at play. Principals would need a critical consciousness that has sufficient depth to enable them to utilise critical constructivist skills such as introspection, interpretation and evaluation (Bentley, Fleury & Garrison, 2007; Kincheloe, 2008) as the first step towards taking action. Kincheloe (2008:30) refers to this level of critical consciousness as a 'consciousness of complexity' which acknowledges that the world is filled with complexities. Participants related the perceptions which others had about them, to their identity as figures of authority. It could very well be that those perceptions are due to their identity as social reconcilers. But none of the participants related those perceptions to their agency which enable them to express social-reconciliatory and conflict-sensitive values through policy formulation or democratic school culture.

The responses from the participants indicate the role of other people in keeping the conflict 'alive'. Conflict resolution is not dependent on one person. It requires adversaries to take the risk in trusting a process. Through dialogue and mindful listening (Young, 2003:251) the adversaries can learn to accept others' right to co-exist (Kumar, 1999:10) and their points of

view. To depend purely on the authority of the school leader to bring about conflict resolution undermines the spirit of social reconciliation.  Contrary to the views of certain participants, I found learning materials in Module Three that dealt with conflict handling, including reading material on negotiations and conflict mediation. The depth in conflict handling coupled to practical and applied competence could most likely have been inadequate for the learners. In this regard, Hemson (2006:48) supports my view by arguing that continuing professional development for teachers cannot merely focus on understanding of the 'other.' Taking into account the view of reconciliatory pedagogy of Ferreira (2008:38) and Magendzo (2005:137), learning about conflict handling would require critical thinking that searches for common ground through problematising 'othering' and seeking sameness as much as acknowledging diversity.

Filling of promotion posts, disagreements about class sizes and learners, moderation and workload were issues that fuelled conflict among teachers. Interference by the school governing body with school management issues affected relations between parents and school leaders. Lindiwe, Clive and Maliwe's responses showed a maturity in acknowledging the role that school leaders can play in promoting conflict and tension.

"Sometimes, indirectly proper management can lead to less conflict. For example, financial transparency."(Interview: Lindiwe, September 2011)

"The skills I got helped for example with school moderation. Internal moderation which is supposed to be done in school can really help to reduce the conflict because you find the teachers will be fighting (at the) beginning of the year about the quality of learner they were getting from the previous class. So now I was able to advise the principals to do internal moderation and be able to analyse the results each and every term so that they can be able to pick up on any challenges that may cause conflict."  (Interview: Nozuko, November 2011)

"When I was deputy principal at the school, there was no leadership at the school and it caused major problems. There were cliques at the school, favouritism, back-biting, especially after internal moderation and conflict about how promotion posts are being filled" (Interview: Maliwe, November 2011)

On the other hand, Martha, Nozuko and Linda made reference to the role teachers played in simmering tensions at the school:

"Sometimes the Education Department has conflict management workshops and you send teachers and when they come back you see it did not really change them. It is really about the person's attitude." (Interview: Martha, October 2011)

"They [teachers] need to know how to resolve their problems, conflicts and also the skills of problem solving. They need to deal with their attitude. You will see, some of them give their full responsibility to resolve conflict to management. They want to

shift it to another person, without starting with themselves as teachers." (Interview: Nozuko, November 2011)

"The difficulties are transformative in nature. There are teachers who are unwilling to accept change. They are accustomed to doing things the traditional way. As a newly appointed principal at the school, I struggle with teachers who are not prepared to do things differently. And of course in their view, management must take the blame for everything that goes wrong. As far as I am concerned, it is about quality education, that's what I want." (Interview: Linda, November 2011)

Causes for conflict such as internal moderation, teacher workload and learner performance mentioned by the participants might seem on the surface to be curriculum-related matters, but it reaches the heart of socio-economic circumstances. From the participants' responses, it would seem that other than policy formulation as a conflict-sensitivity approach, they experience difficulties in giving expression to values of conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation. By implication, it signals that the ACE programme may indeed have contributed significantly to participants' preparedness, but the task of equipping with useful strategies, tools or approaches may not have been dealt with sufficiently.

The context of the learner, teacher and parent is equally important as the systems the Department of Education has put in place to ensure quality education. This view is substantiated by Nozuko:

"The parents of today are different from parents of the past. We getting more single parents now, so we need to review the way we are dealing with the parent. The principals in the class were sharing the lack of support and parental involvement at school. What I am trying to say, it helped us to open the debate where you [as school leader] are being frustrated about the quality of parents we are getting today. It is easy to say that the curriculum or the department must provide quality learners. But parents should take responsibility. But single parents have their own problems and all that leads them to neglect their children's work and that is affecting the performance of the teachers." (Interview: Nozuko, November 2011)

In this regard, I realised that leading and managing the curriculum based on conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values can present difficulties for the school leaders if the values are not embraced by others. Tensions among teachers about under- versus achieving learners might sound politically incorrect and improper in human rights and education circles, but against the backdrop of increasing pressure to improve learner performance, the likelihood of teachers competing for learners who are able to perform will continue. Hay (1998) identifies three key elements in resolving conflict through social reconciliation – remembering, engaging and remedying. The latter elements are more complex than remembering. According to Kumar (1999:3), engaging requires reciprocal dialogue which

may not be forthcoming from teachers whom the participants view as unco-operative and unwilling to change.

The policy or progressive discipline as touched on in Module 3 'Lead and manage people' may not change teachers' behaviour or attitude. Linda asks the question, "How do you skill teachers to become transformative leaders in their own right?" In a similar vein John shares his experience of the knowledge gap between himself and his colleagues after the programme. IJR (2003:153) suggests that empowering others is an important pillar of social reconciliation. John and Linda's dilemma is the reality that while school leaders may be ready to fulfil their roles as agents of social reconciliation, their colleagues and other stakeholders may not. The task of drawing others along is a complex one that requires careful thinking. In my view, critical constructivism does not address this dilemma adequately, which may very well place critical constructivist educators at the centre of controversy.

A sound knowledge about policies and procedures supports school leaders in contextualising the conflicts from a legal perspective. It adds value by guiding the mediator and opposing parties in terms the constitutional stipulations which no party can violate. But to take mediation to its conclusion where parties feel that the process has been fair, school leaders would need to know the sophistication of communicating in troubled times. Conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values should find expression in how conflict is handled and how conflict prevention is sustained in tangible ways. Both Villa-Vicencio (2009) and Magendzo (2005:140) warn that the outcome of dialogue is not necessarily reconciled persons. But at the very least, conflict handling can contribute towards opposing parties constructing and deconstructing (Kincheloe, 2008:47) understandings of each other. To this end, Slotte (2004:44) argues for 'dialogue as communication with' each other rather than 'dialogue that is about' each other.

> "We arrange some workshops, Quaker Peace, that normally happen towards the end of each term. I don't know if they (are) tired of one another (so) that they (get) itchy but no one can say something to one another, then they bite at each other. I don't know what it is." (Interview: Martha, October 2011)

Perhaps Martha's response is an indication of how little we know about each other.

**Develop principals who are critically engaged and self reflective practitioners**

*Adult learning, conflict sensitivity and critically engagement with peers*

Directed, site-based learning as well as collaborative learning provided the participants with an anchor and certainly a support system during the ACE enabling the partial achievement of this aim. The participants believed that they benefited from their peers and lecturers to bounce off their experiential learnings. By their own admission, the class discussions, group activities and assignments enabled other voices which could act as further points of

reference to emerge. Those participants who displayed capabilities of critical understanding and evaluation valued these platforms. I liken the collaborative learning spaces to Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice because, besides the prescribed spaces of learning, participants constantly engaged each other through telephonic, email and face-to-face meetings to share, exchange and bounce off ideas and perspectives about their daily experiences.

The waning of these voices after graduation has prompted participants to return to the memory of the programme and its learnings as a resource. Lindiwe, Linda, Paul and Clive mentioned that they constantly utilised their theoretical knowledge and portfolios as reference points to guide their questioning and problem solving. Linda, Clive, Johan and Maliwe revealed that they were still in contact with their peers on a professional and social level. Beaver (2009:26) argues that this mode of inquiry is typical of the way that 'good teachers' as adult learners learn. Paul, in fact, took his three heavily laden files out of car after the interview. Linda and Lindiwe interrupted their interviews to draw their assignments from the bookshelves in their offices. Canadian teachers in Tarcs and Smaller's (2009:123) study on work-based learning have similar experiences of constantly learning to inform their teaching. It is perhaps the loss of a community of practice that Clive laments about when he reflects on his current experiences:

> "You can look at my school policy on conduct and communication. Who speaks and who speaks for whom? There were a lot of policies that I had to overhaul. The effect that the course had on me … If you look at the assessment programme, we have a very emphatic assessment programme now. Current issues, we discuss it and look at what is not happening at the moment, because of the ACE. I fear the gap between your knowledge [the ACE graduate] and that of the staff. You are so much more equipped and your educators don't understand you. I give you an example, inclusive education. Most educators don't know much. If I talk about curriculum approaches, they don't know what I am talking about. The level of debate [in the ACE class] was extremely high, people were maybe shy to ask … So the class was dominated by a few." (Interview: Clive, September 2011)

Evidently, the data suggests that the participants valued the collaborative approaches which the ACE afforded to enhance critical engagement and self-reflection capabilities. Bentley, Fleury and Garrison (2008:20) regard 'reflection, imagination, social consciousness and democratic citizenry' as key pillars of critical constructivism.

To this end, from a critical constructivist perspective, the data suggests that the depth of critical engagement and self-reflection may not have been sufficient to enable conflict-sensitivity and social-reconciliation values to become firmly anchored in the participants' management and leadership styles.

***Adult learning, conflict sensitivity and self- reflection in a globalising school***

Brookfield (1995:9) puts forward the idea that 'classrooms are contested spaces' because of the social and economic contexts which influence social relations among learners, parents and educators. Exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence (Young, 1998, cited in Hemson, 2006:46) as experienced in the broader community, spill over into the school grounds, influencing exclusionary and assimilatory practices. Kincheloe (2008:3) recognises the learner and teacher as social and historical beings who have set world views prior to entering learning spaces. From the interviews it became evident that conflict management is an integral part of managing a school owing to the influences that socio-economic and political contexts have on teaching and learning. The following response reflects the extent to which a participant is critically reflecting and constructing knowledge (Kincheloe, 2008:11) about his abilities to handle conflict within these contexts:

> "But one tends to think of conflict as something that is on the surface and visible. There are hidden conflicts that we deal with every single day. From the piece of paper landing on your desk, there is conflict which competes with what I believe but I [as an education official] have to do it. It [conflict] plays itself out daily. In the end, it makes you either a rebel, makes you a transformer or someone who takes a different direction. So dealing with conflict you have to find common ground, find commonalities that will benefit the learner and society at large. Even in dealing with moderation, you find conflict there as well, major conflicts." (Interview: Clive, September 2011)

Not all the participants were able to see conflict in its hidden unobtrusive form. Martha and Nozuko, for example, did not view the xenophobia attacks as threatening because their learners were not physically affected. Nor were most participants able to critically interpret conflict that stemmed from curriculum matters. This could signal that learning opportunities to become self-reflective school leaders in the ACE may not have focussed on the 'critical edge' which critical constructivists allude to. Critical constructivists (Bentley, Fleury & Garrison, 2007; Kincheloe, 2008) argue that uncritical knowledge construction will not lead to social change.

On the other hand, the degree to which the participants take responsibility for their own learning is of equal importance. There were participants who, based on the data, revealed deep self-reflective thinking about the impact of conflict on teaching and learning. For example, Clive identified that assessment and moderation as curriculum matters were not separate from the socio-economic contexts of the learners. In his interview, he mentions how he grapples with the kind of agency he should follow:

> "In the end, it makes you either a rebel, makes you a transformer or someone who takes a different direction. So dealing with conflict you have to find common ground,

find commonalities that will benefit the learner and society at large. Even in dealing with moderation, you find conflict there as well, major conflicts." (Interview: Clive, September 2011)

What makes Clive decide whether he will be a 'rebel, transformer or someone who takes a different direction' in his relationship with the DOE is very much located in how his view of society shapes his knowledge construction:

> "Hence you have today a very pronounced distinction, disparity, chasm really between those of who are middle-class and those that are the proletariat still, and it is noticeable in our schools. But the ideals that people strive for, that the DOE wants, are what the privileged, the fortunate have. To put it plainly, you run a race, the one lane has been stuck with barriers, hindrances, the other lane is quite clean. People are set off at the same time. Those participating are expected to reach the end goal at the same time regardless of the context. And that is the problem we have in South Africa. Our curriculum is a middle-class curriculum informed by middle-class values." (Interview: Clive, September 2011)

The point Clive raises is a crucial one for the self-reflective, critical constructivist educator. The implementation of the curriculum has being rigid in the sense that educators have very little freedom. Learning programmes and materials are prescribed, policies direct the way in which the curriculum has to be interpreted irrespective of the social and economic contexts of the learners. From the viewpoint of critical constructivists, the 'one size fits all' approach inhibits the educator's ability to raise and act upon her critical consciousness and that of her learners.

Johan's experience reflects how acting upon one's critical consciousness can be a difficult journey. When Johan led his former school to accept racial change, he was ostracised by a sector of the community in which he lived for allowing black, English- speaking learners and teachers to join the school. Currently, as a white school leader working in schools with a predominately black learner and teacher composition, he continues to experience difficulties in being accepted as someone who can make a real contribution to the well-being of schools:

> "As I said, the school changed from a predominantly white school, to a [racially] mixed school, and of course that was problematic for some people. So I lost learners. Especially, my Afrikaans learners than went to the other Afrikaans-medium school, with the court case that we had, as well. So that was a challenge for me." (Interview: Johan, September 2011)

> "When I was appointed here [place of work], some of my black colleagues said openly that I would not make it in Khayelitsha [as a white circuit manager] but I am so happy there. So I think handling violence or conflict among races actually comes

very naturally to me, but at that time I don't think I actually felt equipped to deal with the situation then. Does it make sense?" (Interview: Johan, September 2011)

In some instances, participants alluded to the normalisation of conflict within the school and its community. The 'normalisation' influences how the conflict was handled by the school leaders. Vandalism, for example, was experienced at Clive, Martha, Keith and Nozuko's respective schools. In one instance, Nozuko utilised the community members to secure the school but the other participants addressed vandalism by simply fixing the broken items and waiting expectantly for the next attack.

"That [vandalism] is common practice, I don't think they even know what they're doing." (Interview: Clive, September 2011)

"So the school created the security measures where some of the volunteers from the community would try to secure the school." (Interview: Nozuko, November 2011)

Similar to the responses on vandalism, there were incidents which affected the school but that the participants viewed as out of their sphere of influence or control. Martha, whose learners are bussed into school, noted how schooling is disrupted by taxi rivalry:

"It [taxi rivalry] has an impact on the school because when we have to pick up the learners, we can't go into the area, especially in Lwandle and Nozamu informal settlements." (Interview: Martha, October 2011)

Martha mentioned that the school drafted a policy on safety to address the matter but the policy addressed how teachers, parents and bus drivers will handle the situation when it arises. Like Martha, two other participants' (Linda and Johan's) learners came from surrounding communities and travelled to school. Learners from the other schools lived in the immediate vicinity of the school. In the former situation, participants believed that they were less affected by community-based conflict because the school was situated away from the community. Martha, for instance, was conscious of xenophobia in certain communities in which her learners lived but did not perceive xenophobia as affecting the school.

"It really does not affect our school because we are not in the area where it happened." (Interview: Martha, October 2011)

There were participants who realised the value of working with the community as a strategy to building conflict sensitivity in schools. Relations with community members and structures were deemed to be central to reducing conflict as schools. In the same vein, school leaders were also aware of the difficulties related to these partnerships:

"You know, some time ago a person wanted to apply for a principal's post. He asked me whether I was not scared to work in this community. He asked whether at three o'clock when the school day ends, I move out of this community. You can't do that. You know especially you as the principal, if you work here, then you must be

prepared to go into this community to work with them. You know, I work closely with the community leaders as well. Here's a lot of different community leaders in this area. They come to me and they discuss things and they want to be involved with the school. That is also a huge process in this area because of the diversity of this community." (Interview: Paul, September 2011)

"You become so cautious to interfere to some of the community's tensions. So my limitation, I have certain limitations, is I need to ensure that the parents are sending their learners to school and I need to ensure that those learners are safe at school" (Interview: Nozuko, November 2011)

From the responses, the enormity of social challenges can hinder the agency of school leaders if they do not employ or utilise their critical consciousness to engage stakeholders in their community. Relational building with community leaders and structures is an important, but complex strategy which school leaders evidently find difficulty in pursuing. In this regard, a social-reconciliatory approach as discussed in the literature is a necessity. The skills to nurture mutual trust and respect as well as a critical understanding of the community dynamics at play present new learning needs that the programme may not have addressed in ways that foster social reconciliation.

### *Adult learning, conflict sensitivity and global learning*

Against the backdrop of local and global conflict fault lines, participants unanimously identified the building of conflict-sensitive schools as a global need. Of particular interest to the participants was the learning opportunity for school leaders to deal effectively with conflict. Conflict and its impact on learning and teaching were viewed by all of the participants as a global phenomenon affecting school leadership worldwide. Paul made specific reference to his contact with European learners:

"I had students from Belgium and France. They were researching the wetlands and they made use of our learners. I spoke to them about their countries and it seems to me in Belgium, they are also sitting with a problem with foreigners moving into the European countries. They have to deal with that as well, so I would say not only South Africa. But, if you see nowadays among all people, all races are right over the world, so maybe we must accept it and deal with it. There's nothing we can do about it." (Interview: Paul, September 2011)

Clive viewed conflict as a natural human phenomenon that comes about as a result of competing forces clashing with each other. The ambitious nature of human beings coupled to the need for security and the influence of the global economy on local economies were seen as reasons for an increase in conflict at local and global levels.

He reflected on the interconnectedness of the world and how it impacted on learning and teaching. According to Clive, the influence of a neo-liberal global economy on the state's

purse affected the provisioning of education not only in financial terms but also in terms of what is taught and learnt in South African schools. Lindiwe took a similar view to Clive, arguing that human beings will find ways to secure themselves from harm even though others may view their actions as violent.

Migration affected the entire sample, but I could not gauge from the participants' responses the extent to which immigrants were utilised as a resource to foster global learning in the classroom and within the broader school community. The responses revealed how the immigrants were assimilated into the schools' ethos and culture but not necessarily how their cultures have become part of the schools' fabric. Nevertheless, the recognition by the participants that global learning as part of continuing professional development for educations reflects that the participants acknowledged that firstly, knowledge is constructed in social and historical contexts and secondly, that knowledge construction is influenced by one's multiple identities (Kincheloe, 2008:10).

> "I think it [relations with immigrants] improved because we noticed that they were scared, and it's almost like we had to comfort them to make them feel at home and safe here at school, and the same with our black Africans. The respect for those people, and you know me, as the principal of the school in the assembly, I made sure that I informed the learners to respect them and their problems that they have. Now at the moment, we won't even notice that there are foreigners at this school. They are part of the school. We are family, that's what makes our relationships good." (Interview: Paul, September 2011)

With the exception of Nozuko, all the participants, including those who did not have immigrant learners and teachers, debriefed learners and parents during and after the xenophobic violence. I recognised these interventions as examples of social-reconciliatory practices. It was unclear whether these attempts at reducing the social distance between South Africans and immigrants were on-going.

In response to what learning needs school leaders globally required, Clive, Paul, Keith, Martha and Lindiwe highlighted human relations as an important starting point.

> "What people need to learn would be as an educator, firstly to know yourself. You must know who you are.  Secondly, to know the world and understand the world and what is required to have a conflict-free society, to understand conflict and the cause of it.  Start knowing the learner and the people. What makes them do what they do, what context do they have? How can I employ the knowledge that I have to give that person a chance to successfully live his life? The educator can learn from the learner, as much as the learner can learn from the educator, because if the educator understands and learns from the learner he can get new insights in how to teach. (Interview: Clive, September 2011)

"I am saying your relationship with others. I was speaking to one of the Xhosa ladies and some of the Coloureds were sitting there. You could see how proud she was to say that our principal understands Xhosa, our principal he understand us, you see, and that is why I'm saying, I think the departing point here is the human relationship– that is, I think that is where you must start with it all, and I think try to understand them also, try to understand how they think, their ways of thinking. (Interview: Paul, September 2011)

The participants' views about the interrelatedness of the world reveal an understanding of globalisation (Cheng,2004), highlighting a key element of Kincheloe's (2008:30) 'consciousness of complexity' which calls upon critical constructivist educators to be mindful that how the world is perceived depends on where the knowledge producer (the teacher or learner) is located.

Lindiwe, in particular, emphasised the necessity for educators to critically interpret and reflect on their responses to conflict or tension. In addition, she recognised a human weakness (stubbornness, shame, guilt) in failing to acknowledge wrong-doing as a hindrance to conflict resolution. Uncritical knowledge production about the other (Kincheloe, 2008) will lead to emotional outbursts in times of conflict because it signals that conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values are not rooted deeply in the way that relations with others are conducted.

"We need to train ourselves to strengthen our emotional intelligence. Often we say things in haste and our emotions run away. Then we regret what we have said, we make a mistake and now we don't know how to respond." (Interview: Lindiwe, September 2011)

Interestingly, the participants alluded to self-directed and situated learning as opposed to workshops, seminars or lectures as viable learning options that school leaders globally could benefit from. For Paul, understanding cultural rituals and traditions, especially when these clashed with his personal worldview, was not as easy as learning to breach the social divide through learning each other's language. Critical constructivists, according to Kincheloe, (2008) cannot 'be confined to one cultural way of seeing and making meaning.' School leaders in a globalising school would need knowledge about diverse cultures within the school community. Despite these communication hurdles, their views present an opportunity for a global community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Cheng, 2004) in which global solidarity can thrive.

### Participants' understanding of their agency as social reconcilers

Participants viewed their agency as social reconcilers firstly in terms of their personal qualities and linked it to the community, citizenship and pastoral care-giver role that

educators were expected to emulate according to the MRTEQ (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011)

> "I would think my willingness to learn, my willingness to listen and to get into the other person. Definitely, willingness, trust and being sensitive, because I'm a sensitive person."(Interview: Johan, September 2011)

> "Fortunately, my character lends itself to social reconciliation. I don't want enemies, I try to work with them. People come from different backgrounds and have different pains. Anger affects relations. Social differences convince people to go with the opposing view. But trust and respect irrespective of the differences is important. I believe we must engage each other, involve those that see themselves as enemies so that we can develop each others' strengths. And we must acknowledge people for what they contribute. One has to be part of the community. When they celebrate, you celebrate, when they mourn, mourn with them. So I believe that as a leader of the school, I must develop relationships with the leadership of other community structures." (Interview: Maliwe, November 2011)

According to Paul and Linda, poor human relations and a lack of communication skills hamper social inclusion in limiting social reconciliation. In an earlier response Johan also highlighted the need for better communication skills as a learning opportunity that can be strengthened in the ACE's curriculum. At Paul's school, the parents have asserted their multi-cultural and racial identities, forcing the school to assume an integrationist approach rather than assimilation. Paul, who has a black African and Coloured staff, admits that when the school was established, learner, parent and teacher relations were strained by language and cultural differences. Kincheloe (2008:125) argues that diversity without dialogue and the building of relations as central feature to learning about the 'other' can lead to conflict.

> "People need to learn how to work in diverse settings. You can't be scared of the community you're working in and because you're scared you exclude people. We need to learn how to handle the community because people are different. I have Rastafarians with a different culture and religion to mine but I need to learn how to deal with them. There is a return to Khoisan culture in this community. So I need to understand the Khoisan Chief and I must know who he is. I trusted my own experiences and tried on my own. The ACE programme did not give me that. Personal relations are not part of the curriculum but it's needed." (Interview: Paul, September 2011)

Given the existence of communication channels, Paul's comments leaned most likely towards how we communicate with each other in diverse settings. Linda's response below corroborates this view:

"I think conflict resolution is very necessary, how to deal with social issues and where to go for help. How do I skill the staff, senior learners and the school governing body, because not everyone handles change very well. Educators are new and not always knowledgeable about diversity. It's embarrassing when people still have racist thinking and they're part of the school." (Interview: Linda, November 2011)

While there was an acknowledgement that handling conflict in ways that reconciled parties was a necessity, the process was easier said than done. Social reconciliation came across as a term participants aspired to but struggled to implement in ways that would sustain social harmony. It became apparent that existing social-reconciliatory efforts had elements of preventative and reactive measures. For example, policy development was regarded as important systemic processes to prevent conflict from arising, but at the same time as tools to promote democratic governance or weapons to deal with transgressions. Perhaps the status quo exists for the participants because the task as social reconcilers seems hard to attain given the enormity of the challenges facing communities.

Dialogue, on the other hand, came across as a reactive measure when tensions had spilled over to acts of aggression and violence. Finding ways to give expression to their agency prior to an act of aggression are learning opportunities that can be strengthened in the ACE's curriculum. Both Johan and Nozuko (who in their current role as circuit managers find themselves mediating between opposing parties) highlighted the need to prioritise mechanisms to resolve conflicts. The appeal for communication skills coupled to the emphasis on human relations suggests that participants are overwhelmed by the enormity of their social realities. Martha, Linda, Paul, Lindiwe and Nozuko could not recognise social-reconciliatory approaches in the ACE. Johan, Keith, Clive and Maliwe saw elements of social reconciliation in the way in which the ACE encourages the school leader to become transformative and participatory leaders. Clive found the non-prescriptive manner in the programme appealing since it allowed school leaders to develop conflict sensitivity in ways that acknowledged the specific context of the school community.

From a critical constructivist perspective, the participants' 'consciousness of complexity' (Kincheloe, 2008:30) was heightened, but they struggled not in accepting their agency but in exercising their agency. Kincheloe (2008:2) and other critical constructivists (Bentley, Fleury & Garrison, 2007:20) raise the need for critical constructivist educators to take decisive action in the interest of social transformation and justice. But in context such as that of the participants, agency is difficult to enact because of restrictions placed on educators by perhaps the employer or sectors of the community. It would seem that in giving expression to the agency, the participants recognised the areas which they could merely influence in the hope for progressive change. This could signal that the ACE curriculum has not provided sufficient opportunity to engage educators about how to give expression to one's agency as a social reconciler.

**Enable principals to manage their organisations as learning organisations and instil values supporting transformation in the South African context**

Drawing on critical hermeneutics, Kincheloe (2008:20) states that a critical constructivist educator requires a critical interpretive ability that enables knowledge production to be interpreted from different vantage points. The power or authority vested in the position of the school leader is an unavoidable factor that influences how knowledge about the 'other' is produced and interpreted. An agent of social reconciliation would need not only to understand how perceptions of the 'other' have the potential to cause conflict, but also the ability to critically interpret why these perceptions exist to the detriment of the 'other' and to internalise values of conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation.

*The ACE School Leadership classroom*

Based on the responses of the participants, it became evident that ACE itself was a microcosm reflecting how race became a form of 'othering.' The ACE classroom helped the participants to contextualise their organisations in relation to the broader national picture of schooling and the values that would be required to ensure social transformation. Participants agreed unanimously that classroom and group discussions coupled to assignments heightened their critical consciousness about the harmful practices of 'othering.' Critical constructivists have argued for learning spaces that enable learners to develop critical consciousness (Bentley, Fleury & Garrison, 2007:10) to tackle exclusionary and discriminatory practices. In the racially diverse class, participants have indicated that learning about the 'other' increased their understanding of the country's diverse schooling contexts.

> "Being the only white student in the class, I think I gained a lot of insight into my fellow students. I learnt so much in those two years, in the contact sessions that we had ... it was built into the programme, a very good theoretical knowledge about conflict and diversity." (Interview: Johan, September 2011)

> ''I got to know more about people, more about communities. What I discovered through the ACE is the different contexts. My theoretical framework – not that it was not formed, but it was strengthened to the extent that I could engage with other learners in the class and could have more brain-wrestling sessions with the lecturers as well.' (Interview: Clive, September 2011)

Kincheloe (2008:25) has warned against merely accepting knowledge production without processing the knowledge through critical inquiry and interpretive processes. As much as exposure to the narrative of the 'other' has helped the school leaders to construct or deconstruct knowledge about each other, the interaction with each other demonstrates that reconciliation is a complex process (IJR, 2003:7). I substantiate my view by referring to remarks made by participants about each other:

"Dr Gaba stood out for me as a lecturer. The class had few African learners, mostly Coloured and one white learner. People (had) never heard of her before [as a lecturer] and they challenged this African lady. Most people did not even call her Doctor but they learnt a lot from her. And I learnt that if I don't have self-confidence as a school leader, people will walk all over me." (Interview: Maliwe, November 2011)

"I do not know whether it [social reconciliation] was as a module, as it were. But it came through, it filtered through our different modules. I think this is probably one of the reasons why some of the principals dropped out of the course as well because I don't know whether there was enough trust from their side as well." (Interview: Johan, September 2011)

Kincheloe (2008:26) argues that the product is equally as important to analyse as the process of constructing knowledge. Paul felt that understanding the context was not enough to intervene in the habit of 'othering.' At his school, he has Rastafarian learners and parents. He felt that while he understood their cultural contexts, he did not always know how to handle the conflict that arose as a consequence of divergent cultural understandings. Conflict management by its very nature requires the school leader as the mediator to consider different interpretations of the perceptions held.

Participants agree that the ACE had provided learning opportunities to understand diversity, change and conflict through assignments, peer discussions and learning material. The lecturers' vast experience and knowledge were held in high esteem and regarded as an important contributing factor to their level of understanding. Maliwe's response to my question whether the ACE expanded his theoretical knowledge about conflict and diversity, illustrates the important role the lecturers as adult educators played in the lives of their learners:

"Yes, definitely. I must be honest, when I entered the course because of my own life, I had internal conflict at the school and I learnt that conflict was not an enemy. I learnt from the professor that to talk about what you don't feel comfortable with and getting involved in the structures [community] was important." (Interview: Maliwe, November 2011)

"Dr Esau, you know his approach and his knowledge, he has a vast amount of knowledge but I think he was also a previous principal." (Interview: Paul, September 2011)

The racially mixed class in itself added to the learning experiences of the learners. It was Johan's first exposure to learning at a place of learning previously designated for particular racial groupings. His early introductory remark, "I am a black in a white skin" bore testimony

to the racial hangovers still in the minds of the participants. I draw on two responses from different participants to substantiate my view.

> "I have learnt so much during those two years of conversations that we had and we really did have very good lecturers. I will always speak very highly of them. I think it [theoretical knowledge] was built into the programme. We got a very good theoretical knowledge about conflict and also about diversity in our South African context. I will always value what I've learnt, especially when it comes to diversity and conflict." (Interview: Johan, September 2011)

> "Dr Gaba stood out for me as a lecturer. The class had few African learners, mostly Coloured and one White learner. People (had) never heard of her before [as a lecturer] and they challenged this African lady. Most people did not even call her Doctor but they learnt a lot from her. And I learnt that if I don't have self-confidence as a school leader, people will walk all over me." (Interview: Maliwe, November 2011)

These responses support Magendzo's (2005:140) view that the wounds of the past influence educators' understanding of conflicts. In the same breath, contexts can inhibit the educator's agency. Understanding conflict, change and diversity was one of the learning needs of the participants; the other was how to activate change. The participants' views that the ACE did not spend sufficient time on managing change is perhaps an indication of the depth that the learning opportunities provided in understanding the intricacies of managing the complex contexts within which conflict occurs.

The divergent views of participants and sometimes contradictory responses of the same participant, reflected how they as adult learners continue to question, challenge and make meaning (Beaver, 2009, Brookfield, 1995) of their learning contexts. It confirms findings of earlier studies by Hemson (2006:46) and Nkomo and Vandeyar (2008:21) that educators are struggling with the challenges of diversity and integration. Contrary to Clive's and Martha's views, others felt that more emphasis on handling conflict was equally important. The element of experiential and self-directed learning appealed to some learners. Clive appreciated that the programme was not 'prescriptive' in how he could mediate conflict.

> "However, I also found that in the course itself, some of those things are self-explanatory and some of the things you made up as you went along through crisis after crisis. You get a workable solution but then add that, of course there could be simpler methodologies ... There is not one generic that you can say this generic can work for everybody because every school has its individual soul and problems." (Interview: Clive, September 2011)

> "Well, every situation is different, you can go to how many workshops that explain win-win situations or a win-lose situation, but when you get to the reality and you

have to work with human beings, it's quite different than people teaching you. If you are in the situation you have to be calm and then you have to see where the conflict comes from. Then you have to assist those, even leave them alone talk to one another. Or bring in the mediator, give them time just to cool off or time to sit together and talk about it." (Interview: Martha, October 2011)

Linda indicated that the ACE merely provided learning material that was "procedural in nature, the do's and don'ts within the context of legislation". She explained that the ACE provided a solid basis for communicating the Department of Education's policies in terms of curriculum, human resources and labour relations management, but not necessarily how implementation by its very nature requires mediation. Nozuko supports Linda's view, arguing that the need for principals to mediate and resolve conflict is growing at an alarming rate:

"If I can reflect, there was not too much on conflict resolution. It was touched on here and there, especially when we dealing with an assignment referring to my school. It needs some more exposure because I feel that it is becoming more common. Look at the recent incident where the learners were chasing the principal off the school premises. The principal is a highly respected person and why did the learners chase him?" (Interview: Nozuko, November 2011)

Johan added that communication skills when dealing with conflict were lacking in the programme:

"I just felt at the time that we did not spend enough time on communication. I raised it then as well but it was something that I felt was lacking, communication. It is so important because being a school leader is about communicating and that is what I felt was not handled and not addressed efficiently." (Interview: Johan, September 2011)

### 'Othering' and school leadership

Tackling 'othering' was a painful, unpopular process and even politically incorrect, depending on the dominant political view. Two participants shared personal experiences of the costs it carried. Maliwe explained how during the xenophobia attacks in 2008, he prevented learners at the school gate from marching out to attack immigrants. His defence of the immigrants was triggered by his personal experiences of rejection in his family home town in the Eastern Cape.  Johan explains how listening to the experiences of his peers helped him to come to terms with the anger of parents when the school accepted learners of colour for the first time in its history:

"What I did [at my school] as principal, I knew many of these things, but it was not planned, it was a gut feeling at the time, knowing that I am doing what I am supposed to do, transforming the school, changing the community as well ... and

that brought a lot of conflict between me and the community. But I got that realisation in the [ACE] class that this is what I was supposed to do, confirmation as it were ..." (Interview: Johan, September 2011)

"My wife would support me because she would experience me at home, frustrated with the community. The community was calling me names from all sides because I used to live in the community. But ultimately it's a lonely job as a leader and you must come to terms of that as well. It's not popular but if you believe in it, you must go for it." (Interview: Johan, September 2011)

Earlier on Nozuko admitted to being cautious about getting involved in community tensions. Her comments suggest that she prefers not to be seen as siding with a particular group. Taking a neutral stance is perhaps an escape from 'othering', but Kincheloe (2008) argues that there are no neutral perspectives in critical constructivist thinking. Magendzo (2005:141) puts forward the experiences of Latin American teachers, some of whom favour homogenisation despite a diverse school context. He argues for educators to develop ways in which introspection can enable them to 'decode and deconstruct' their sense of reality.

I found a 'language of othering' prevalent during the interviews. Participants would refer to themselves and others as 'us, them, we, foreigners, the Xhosa, the Coloureds, the Sothos.' At times it was a practical way of explaining or referring to a different group. On other occasions, it hinted at an assimilatory approach to integration and diversity. Since Kincheloe (2008:3) argues that knowledge is subjective and taken at face value, I studied the data to find signs of social exclusion or inclusion. I draw on instances where 'othering' disadvantaged the learners' right to equal education.

At schools where the learners were predominately black Coloured, the medium of instruction was English and Afrikaans. Similarly, at schools where the learners were isiXhosa-speaking, the languages of learning and teaching were isiXhosa and English. For French- and Portuguese-speaking immigrant learners, as Clive pointed out, the quality of learning and teaching was unequal and therefore compromised. Attempts to accommodate the language preference of minority groups were visible at one primary school only. None of the participants raised the language question of immigrants as problematic. At Lindiwe's primary school that caters for mother-tongue Sesotho-speaking learners, learning each others' languages in conversational settings helped the school community became more accommodating of others. A globalising classroom with increasing language diversity would require greater access to language rights.

The second instance relates to tensions between teachers about learners with learning barriers. Earlier on Nozuko and Maliwe indicated that they improved internal moderation processes as a way to curb fights about the type of learners a teacher may receive in a class. Nozuko's example of internal moderation as a source of conflict was interesting because it revealed how poor curriculum management can put conflict sensitivity at risk. Learners, by

virtue of their academic performance, can become the victims of education. This form of 'othering' based on intellectual ability was unexpected. Module 9 'Moderate assessment' which dealt specifically with moderation as both a technical and curriculum management process, did not consider moderation from the angle of conflict sensitivity. Clive mentioned the difficulties he experienced in changing the assessment policy at his school to become more accommodating of the barriers to learning. The barriers stem from language and literacy difficulties experienced because of the social context of the learners. This form of 'othering' discriminates against learners on the basis of the right to equal education. A remedy that Clive has put in place is workshops for teachers aimed at creating more awareness of the learning barriers and its implications for remedial teaching. This is perhaps one approach to eliminating 'othering' as it pertains to curriculum management.

### *Participants and their own identity as agents of social reconciliation*

Given the contestation regarding reconciliation as a concept (Daly & Sarkin, 2007; Smith 2005; Villa Vicencio, 2009) I pre-empted the likelihood that the participants would hold different views about reconciliation. I chose to explain my understanding of social reconciliation prior to posing the questions in Section D of the interview guide. I pointed out in the interview guide and during the interview that I chose to define social reconciliation as mechanisms that principals can utilise within the school community to promote conflict-sensitive approaches through dialogue.

With this understanding in mind, four (Martha, Johan, Paul and Linda) believed that the ACE did not address social reconciliation in its entirety. Three others (Maliwe, Lindiwe and Keith) believed that through self-directed and experiential learning, they had become agents of social reconciliation. The programme had partially given them the basis to understand conflict and diversity, which in turn helped them fill their role as social reconcilers. Nozuko and Clive shared the view that the curriculum's approach to strengthening the capacity of the school leader provided an enabling environment for social reconciliation. I asked Clive whether the curriculum focused on social reconciliation as a means to handling conflict.

> "Yes, specifically and philosophically. Throughout the modules, different contexts were taken into account. You need to be realistic, you cannot reconcile if you don't know context, you need to know yourself, who you are, because if you can understand sameness and difference, then reconciliation is possible." (Interview: Clive, September 2011)

When I asked Nozuko whether the curriculum helped her to facilitate dialogue as a means of reconciling differences, she gave an example of how the ACE assisted her in promoting reconciliation:

> "The skills I got helped for example with school moderation. Internal moderation which is supposed to be done in school can really help to reduce the conflict because

you find the teachers will be fighting at the beginning of the year about the quality of learner they were getting from the previous class. So now I was able to advise the principals to do internal moderation and be able to analyse the results each and every term so that they can be able to pick up on any challenges that may cause conflict."  (Interview: Nozuko, November 2011)

Taking into account the way in which curriculum matters were facilitated in the ACE, Linda's response to my question regarding reconciliation was thought-provoking. She argued that reconciliation was not part of the WCED's culture of resolving problems. Conflict, according to Linda, was dealt with through the application of policy as a rule book. By implication, Linda's view suggested that she did not see policy implementation as a social-reconciliatory approach. While the module dealing directly with policy development was hailed as informative and much needed by all the participants, Linda's view that policy development was regarded as a means of dealing with conflict was shared by Nozuko and Maliwe:

"Some people don't implement what is written in the policy. But it helps when conflict arises, then you have a document that you can refer to. According to our policy, this is how we are supposed to do certain issues and then it helps with conflict resolution and it helps to put systems in place, even to update systems, but those conflict gives you learning exercises so that you can identify gaps and can see how you can improve those gaps according to what conflict you had." (Interview: Nozuko, November 2011)

"The school had no policies in place when I started out as principal. We experienced problems with internal moderation, admission policies and discipline and so on. The staff was very divided. But when we started developing policies and protocols, it helped the teachers to get to know each other. Everyone got involved in the process. Learner attendance has even improved. Now I have also seen the talent of some of the staff members and I can use those skills to build on. Things are improving at the school." (Interview: Maliwe, November 2011)

Policies were viewed as convenient or alternative ways to dealing with the complexities of reciprocal dialogue and co-operative action which Kumar (1999:10) argues is important to the process of social reconciliation. This approach is likely to put distance between parties and hamper reconciliatory efforts. According to Johan, Paul, Lindiwe and Keith, policy implementation was insufficient to ensure conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation.

"There must be a willingness to really understand and to learn from the other person as well. Sometimes I think there is a lack of willingness. I find a stubbornness, sometimes people don't want to learn. I think with this, there is the important issue of sensitivity. To be sensitive to what the other person is thinking, whether you agree with it or not. But as you say, to respect that person for who they are or what

they are thinking and where they are at. But trust is important."(Interview: Johan, September 2011)

Lindiwe's comments suggest there are conflicts that policies cannot always address. Her school is surrounded by taverns. She relates how drunken customers interfere with the learners. The tavern owners are not bound by her school or the DOE's policies. Before the school was built, the land was used for sports and the soccer clubs believe they have a right to access the school field after school hours. Her concern is the potential vandalism to the school building. She requires other mechanisms to resolve these challenges. In a similar vein, her relation with the tavern owners is difficult to maintain:

> "I find myself having to greet and talk to the tavern owners. They do have some control over their customers. Just through greeting, they know me. When I have a problem, I go and face them. The same applies to the soccer coaches. We had to sit and talk about the school premises. Now the soccer is creating order for the youngsters. And even the garden that we have for the unemployed, it means you must work with the community. Most people think this area is violent but you must deal with the people and confront the leadership." (Interview: Lindiwe, September 2011)

The fifth aim deals specifically with the school leader's competencies in addressing social transformation in the South African context. The interviews with the participants coupled to the informal conversations with teachers, principals, government officials within the DOE and adult educators has made me realise that the complex task I alluded to earlier on, is in its own right a contributor to the broader reconciliation project in South Africa. The ACE, one could then argue plays a pivotal role in the school leader's accomplishment of the social transformation mandate. The literature on reconciliation, however, suggests that it is a difficult, back-and-forth process. As such, it can be expected that the participants with a leaning towards critical constructivist thinking would grapple with the complexities of building conflict-sensitive schools.

# SECTION 5 SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## SUMMARY

The aim of the research was to investigate the extent to which a continuing professional development teacher education programme, the ACE School Leadership Programme, prepares and equips school leaders as agents of social reconciliation within their school communities.

The main research question is: 'To what extent does the ACE School Leadership Programme prepare and equip school leaders as agents of social reconciliation?' Eight sub-questions stated earlier have guided the research which relied upon the theoretical lens of critical constructivism. The investigation focused specifically on whether the ACE's curriculum through the content, literature, philosophies, methods and ideas supported school leaders to understand their role in promoting social inclusion, preventing conflict and nurturing social reconciliation in schools. I have fulfilled the aim of the research. In hindsight, it became evident during the data collection and analysis that the scope of the research question was perhaps too broad for the nature of this study. The research findings suggest the need for further in-depth research of the topic.

The research design and methodology which relied upon a qualitative research approach was appropriate for conducting the empirical data gathering. The utilisation of narrative analysis was useful in providing a platform for me to critically examine, reflect and understand the participants' responses. To a large degree, the purposive sampling of nine participants was a key factor in the success of the research. A limitation, however, was the time constraints during the data collection process. I could not conduct a second round of interviews to probe the data.

I have succeeded, through the theoretical lens of critical constructivism, in gaining insights into the participants' critical understanding of conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation values as facilitated in the ACE and I have learnt how the participants used their experiences and context to reflect on their agency as social reconcilers. The participants revealed learning needs which they feel should be prioritised in order to fulfil their tasks as school leaders. To this end, the research has helped me to gain a deeper understanding of critical constructivism and adult learning in a globalising classroom.

The following new learnings emerge in terms of critical constructivism as a theoretical lens in the study:

Firstly, critical constructivists argue that the school leader should use critical constructions to bring about social change. However, change may not be in the control of the school leader. Factors beyond the control of the school leader as an agent of social reconciliation may hinder progressive action, especially if the school leader's views are not shared by others such as the employer, colleagues and parents.

Secondly, the degree to which the school leader exercises her agency is a personal choice that is influenced by personal and social conditions. Both knowledge production and acting upon new learnings take place in social and historical context. Critical constructivists have paid much attention to the process of producing critical constructivist understandings and have argued that the newly critically constructed learnings should lead to action for social change. However, the latter process of transforming learnings to action has not received attention equal to the process of developing critical constructivist understandings. In other words, critically constructing knowledge is one dimension at play; another is applying one's agency to ensure social change.

Thirdly, the degree to which the school leader exercises her agency is also dependant on the extent to which the school leader is prepared to make personal sacrifices in pursuing conflict sensitive and social-reconciliatory values. When others, especially key stakeholders, do not share conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values, the school leader may have to weigh up the cost of pursuing these values in a volatile context. Critical constructivism assumes that the school leader will enjoy the solidarity of others. If others are not exposed to critical constructivist thinking, the school leader as an agent of social reconciliation may find herself isolated from the community. The school leader while understanding her agency as a social reconciler and therefore embracing conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values, may find that her critical thinking is not recognised nor appreciated by others. In the absence of solidarity, the school leader may find it difficult to implement strategies that can bring about social change.

Consequently, the process of critically constructing knowledge and deciding what to do with new learnings are processes that has the potential to bring the school leader into conflict with her identity as an educator and social reconciler. The school leader who critically evaluates previously held constructions is deconstructing what was accepted and practised until the moment that construction came under scrutiny. World views are questioned, events are replayed in the mind and perspectives are redefined. New learnings may be acknowledged but not acted upon.

This research has heightened my awareness of the complexities in knowledge construction from a critical constructivist viewpoint on two levels. Firstly, the school leader confronts her identity with regard to the products of knowledge and its implications. Practising agency adds an emotional dimension to the critical constructivist thinking process. The data suggests that participants who thought very deeply about their learning experiences became more emotionally involved in the thinking process. The potential for conflict to arise is real because one holds onto to the critically constructed knowledge as truth while others may not share the views of the school leader. The views of the school leader may not be a popular view. The school leader might experience the process of deconstructing and reconstructing as a lonely process that provokes anxiety because of the school leader's uncertainty regarding the reaction of others to her views.

Secondly, the school leader, having confronted herself about the new learnings and the implications thereof, consciously decides not to practise her agency. The different responses from the same participants on similar issues reflect perhaps not contradictory statements but rather where they find themselves in making meaning of their constructions. People may be dialoguing with each other, but as Villa-Vicencio (2009) states, dialogue may not bring about reconciliation, and social reconciliation in my view from a critical constructivist perspective may not be achieved because people are at different stages or levels in their critical thinking about the issue at hand. In other words, there may be other reasons related to how the school leader decides to practise her agency. It may have less to do with poor listening skills (Young, 2003:349), levels of trust and commitment. Perhaps it has more to do with the wounds of the past (Magendzo, 2005:138) that prevent a willingness to take risks.

As a result, there are implications for one's role as an agent of social reconciliation. Kincheloe (2008:11) argues that critical constructivism lends itself to democratic thinking that lead to social change and justice, but the opposite is also true. The school leader may have thought very deeply about conflict sensitivity but is unable or unwilling to action change for very different, valid reasons. Agency then, from a critical constructivist perspective, has multiple layers that require well thought out strategies but also a sense of readiness on the part of the school leader. The latter poses a challenge for which the literature on critical constructivism and I have no answers. Critical constructivists have placed the emphasis on the Self as a subjective being. However, in post-conflict situations where deep wounds hamper social transformation, the Self and one's identity are part of a 'bigger web of reality.' Critical constructivist thinking that places sole emphasis on the individual without equal weight placed on those surrounding the individual will continue to place the critical constructivist educator in isolation, fuelling conflict as opposed to social reconciliation.

**Further research possibilities**

Learning conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values is central to critical constructivism in the sense that the social reconciler has to think, examine and reflect critically on how knowledge is constructed, for what purposes and in whose interests in order to pursue genuine reconciliation. Little is known about the practice of conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values in schools. This study reveals that, although school leaders may embrace these values theoretically, they are searching for constructive ways in which to practise their agency. Participants' responses show that conflict stemming from curriculum implementation and management has the potential to undermine learners' rights to quality education. Furthermore, their responses reveal the potential for learners who speak a different language or come from an impoverished environment to be at an even greater risk.

The literature on critical constructivism is limited to global research and focuses mainly on the individual's critical construction of knowledge. I am unaware of research which seeks to investigate adult learning in South Africa through the theoretical lens of critical constructivism – in particular, research opportunities that will shed light on how to build conflict sensitivity in schools affected by violence which in turn, will assist school leaders as adult learners. This research paper reveals that the individual does not construct knowledge in isolation. New research that investigates how critical constructivist learning is as much a social as it is an individual process would add to the theoretical perspective. Research from a critical constructivist perspective will be useful in informing ways in which educators can promote integration as opposed to assimilation in the globalising classroom and school community.

## FINDINGS

### Most significant contributions of the ACE School Leadership Programme

The ACE has made the most significant contribution in preparing and equipping school leaders for their tasks as agents of social reconciliation in the following ways:

a) The joint venture between tertiary institutions and the DOE in developing and offering the ACE to school leaders was a positive indication to school leaders that the DOE viewed continuing professional development for school leaders as an important factor to realising quality education in South Africa. This, in turn, was viewed as recognition of the identity which school leaders held in the process of delivering quality education.

b) The ACE has heightened the participants' consciousness about their identity as school leaders, particularly how they perceived themselves as professionals within the context of leadership and management. In addition, the ACE created an awareness of how others perceived their role in influencing or not influencing conflict-sensitivity and social-reconciliatory values within their school communities.

c) The ACE enabled participants to practise their agency as social reconcilers through the development of school-based policies. According to the participants, the programme enabled them to utilise policy development as a conflict-sensitive approach to dealing with tension that arose among teachers, learners and parents.

d) A strength of the ACE, according to participants, was its support for and recognition that school leaders needed platforms to enable critical engagement and self-reflection. Opportunities to work in groups and with peers during the course provided safe platforms for participants to learn from each other.

**Further significant contributions of the ACE School Leadership Programme**

The ACE, to a significant extent, enabled school leaders to deepen their understanding and acceptance of conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation as values to practise their agency in the following ways:

a) The ACE's learning materials, particularly the case studies, were sensitive to providing contexts of diverse racial, cultural and ethnic groups in South Africa which school leaders could apply to their contexts. However, issues that caused conflict within the school community related to a greater extent to the impact of socio-economic vulnerabilities than racial or xenophobic sentiments. These issues were not covered to a large degree in the learning material, especially in terms of agency within the context of conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values.

b) While the ACE has broadened the participants' theoretical knowledge about conflict, the emphasis on practical ways to enhance the participants' ability to practise their agency as social reconcilers may have been achieved to a lesser extent. The recognition by participants of the destructive nature of 'othering' is an indicator that they acknowledge that conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values need to translate into tangible acts of agency.

c) The ACE's learning materials, class discussions and assignments through probing questions, comments and debates, raised the participants' awareness of the detrimental effect of conflict, but not to the extent where participants were able to critically construct, analyse and interpret knowledge production that would foster conflict sensitive values. As a result, participants may not have learnt to critically examine the source of the conflict, the power dynamics at play nor the multiple perspectives that diverse stakeholders may have about a conflict. It was also not clear that the participants developed a critical understanding and interpretation that acknowledges the subjective nature of conflict which could enable school leaders to deal with conflict in conflict-sensitive, social-reconciliatory ways.

d) The ACE curriculum has a strong emphasis on the school leader as an individual. The inward-looking critical reflection has made significant gains in school leaders' understanding that their attitudes and behaviours should be underpinned by social transformation values. However, I found that although school leaders acknowledged the difficulties they experienced with others who did not embrace conflict-sensitive and social-reconciliatory values, it would seem that the ACE may not have provided sufficient opportunities to deal with such challenges. Learning from a critical constructivist viewpoint to manage those who, despite capacity and team-building efforts continue to hamper the social transformation agenda, was a skill that the participants were searching for.

e) The ACE's focus on conflict management where the conflict stemmed from the impact of social ills was limited. There was consensus among the participants that their core business of ensuring quality education was sabotaged by social ills such as gang violence, substance abuse, poor parenting and poverty because of the negative impact on teaching and learning. The balance between theoretical knowledge and practice-based learning may not have been sufficient in equipping school leaders with knowledge that increases their theoretical understanding and consciousness but at the same time supports the adult learner with strategies and skills that can be implemented in their local settings.

f) The ACE may not have created sufficient learning opportunities to gain skills and knowledge that enable school leaders to critically interpret and reflect on how or why conflict develops, what conditions enable conflict to simmer and what is required to nurture conflict sensitivity as a preventative strategy.

In a similar vein, the ACE has to some extent contributed towards school leaders' ability to practise their identity as agent of social reconciliation.

a) The ACE did not explicitly address social reconciliation as an important feature of social transformation. Arguably, it is not one of the specific outcomes in any of the modules nor is it covered in readings and the learning guide, but it is implied in the aims and purposes of the ACE. Social reconciliation as a construct is implied in the curriculum but not clearly articulated in the content, philosophical ideas and theoretical underpinnings of the ACE. This shortcoming may have contributed to the limited understanding of social reconciliation and how it relates to the social-transformative school-based curriculum which I found prevalent among the participants.

b) Social reconciliation as a conflict-sensitive approach that supports social transformation within schools is not recognised by the participants as a preventative or early intervention strategy. The ACE may not have placed sufficient emphasis on social reconciliation, firstly as one of the values of social transformation, and secondly, as an important feature of the school leader's role as learner mediator and community, citizen and pastoral care-giver.

c) The ACE contributed towards the participant's recognition of policy development, curriculum and organisation structures as vital enablers of conflict-sensitive approaches in schools. Through these systems, participants made meaningful contributions as agents of social reconciliation. To a large extent, they acknowledged that their leadership and management style enhanced their ability to serve as agents of social reconciliation. However, other conflict-sensitive approaches such as

dialogue were emphasised to a lesser degree. Participants alerted me to the numerous occasions where they engaged in very difficult dialogues with conflicting parties. They pointed out that the willingness of opposing parties to seek resolution coupled to a measure of trust in the process is of equal importance. It is within these complex terrains that the participants felt the ACE could in the near future offer more direction.

d) There were participants who relied on their practice-based, self-directing learning and recognised strong governance in curriculum management and organisational development as a vehicle to develop social-reconciliatory agency. Some participants did not recognise themselves as social reconcilers and believed that their agency resided in their influence with stakeholders to accept a particular view. These participants were of the view that despite their role as community, citizen and pastoral care-giver, their agency rested in their influence and ability to persuade stakeholders to accept a particular view. To a large extent, they felt that their influence was compromised by physical and human resources, time constraints and a demanding workload.

e) Drawing on the unanimous view of school leaders that group and peer discussions within the ACE were beneficial to their learning journeys, the programme succeeded in providing school leaders with a community of practice in which a sense of solidarity and camaraderie could thrive. After graduation, however, these groups ceased to exist. There is a need for these platforms to continue existing in order to support educators in practising their agency as social reconcilers.

f) Participants were in agreement that most of the challenges facing the school were of an external nature. Even conflicts within the school context had peripheral origins. They felt ill equipped to foster relations, particularly with stakeholders (such as tavern owners, taxi operators) who held a different world view. Although local contexts were addressed in the content of the programme, global contexts particularly in the current climate of a globalising classroom were not adequately addressed.

g) Insufficient learning opportunities to develop critical constructivist thinking may have limited the ability for participants to become agents for social reconciliation to a greater extent. Given the constant change in local and global contexts and the potential for conflict to arise, the ACE should provide sufficient opportunity for school leaders to prepare and equip themselves for such possibilities.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

In July 2011, the MRTEQ (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011) replaced the Norms and Standard for Educators (Department of Education, 2000) which guided the development of the ACE as an academic continuing professional development course for school leaders. According to the new policy, the ACE will be phased out in the next two years and a continuing professional development course in school leadership and management will be offered as a diploma in the coming years. The research findings in this study inform the following recommendations that could contribute to the development of the diploma course and other continuing professional development interventions.

1. The curricula of the prospective School Leadership Diploma and other adult education academic programmes should focus on conflict, conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation and be conceptualised within the framework of critical constructivism.

2. The curricula of the prospective School Leadership Diploma should acknowledge the identity of educators as agents of social reconciliation.

3. The learning needs of educators in respect of conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation in schools should be regarded as significant.

4. Social reconciliation has relevance for building conflict sensitivity in schools and as such is an important building block for sustainable social transformation. Several fields of study such as transitional justice and political science have recognised its importance to peace security. Education and its wide range of practitioners will benefit from learning opportunities to gain further insight into its meaning and application.

5. The Department of Basic Education in partnership with universities should offer continuing professional development short courses that focus preventative and early intervention strategies to address conflict management at schools and strengthen school leaders' agency. The curriculum should focus specifically on counselling, mediation and conflict resolution skills that can be applied to diverse contexts and stakeholders to combat the impact of 'othering'.

6. The WCED, non-governmental organisations and other practitioners should provide professional services such as mediation and counselling to schools.

7. School leaders will benefit from participation in both local and global communities of practice that meet regularly to share, exchange and interrogate social-reconciliatory mechanisms that strengthen conflict sensitivity.

**CONCLUSION**

Although education cannot be the universal remedy for the challenges facing local and global contexts, it can make a contribution as an agent for social reconciliation. This research paper has focused on how school leaders are prepared and equipped as agents of social reconciliation through the ACE. The findings suggest that as adult learners, school leaders are critically reflecting on their role as agents of change and how best to fulfil their obligations. In this regard the ACE has succeeded in contributing towards a cadre of adult learners that recognise their workplace and its surrounds as a learning site where one's knowledge construction cannot be accepted at face value.

It is these contestations of what is learnt, how meaning is constructed and deconstructed, that makes the research a personally fulfilling learning engagement. Social reconciliation, the process of learning to know each other through the interrogation of sameness and differences has a long journey ahead in these sites of learning.

Learning itself has become more than an individual action. The relevance of communities of practice has emerged in the research as an important support system for adult learners as practitioners. The response by participants to questions about the benefits of the ACE is well documented in this paper and is certainly evident. But an equally important learning for me as a researcher has been the questioning of the notion around who 'prepares' and who 'equips' school leaders as adult learners. One view which will remain with me as an adult learner is that the classroom has no boundaries, the curriculum is in itself a site of struggle and knowledge construction, in this case about conflict sensitivity and social reconciliation, that can never be taken at face value.

Annexure A: Interview Guide

Section A: The school context

Personal Details

| Name and Surname: | |
|---|---|
| Age:          Gender:          Nationality:          Race: | |

Professional Details

| Name of school currently teaching at: | Position held: |
|---|---|
| Years of service at school: | Year of graduation from ACE SL Programme: |

1.  Reflect the composition of the learners at your school using the following indicators:

| Race | Black African | Black Indian | Black Coloured | White | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Language | Xhosa | Zulu | English | Afrikaans | Other |
| Religion | Christian | Muslim | Hindu | African Traditional | Other |
| Nationality | South African | Other African | European | Australasian | Asian |

2.  Reflect the composition of the educators at your school using the following indicators:

| Race | Black African | Black Indian | Black Coloured | White | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Language | Xhosa | Zulu | English | Afrikaans | Other |
| Religion | Christian | Muslim | Hindu | African Traditional | Other |
| Nationality | South African | Other African | European | Australasian | Asian |

3.  How has the learner and teacher composition changed over the past ten years?

| | Race | Gender | Nationality | Ethnicity | Language | Socio-economics |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Learner | | | | | | |
| Teacher | | | | | | |

4.  What issues have caused conflict or tension at your school or within the community?

| | Tick | | Tick |
|---|---|---|---|
| Relations between different racial groups | | Teacher strikes | |
| Relations between  different ethnic groups | | Rivalry amongst teacher unions | |
| Language diversity breeds tensions | | Unemployment | |
| Xenophobic sentiments | | Vandalism | |
| Party political tensions in the community | | Taxi rivalry | |
| Housing crisis | | Parent/teacher relations | |
| Reaction towards gender-based violence | | Rivalry amongst schools | |
| Reaction towards gang violence | | Other, indicate below | |

Section B: School leaders as adult learners

5. Drawing specifically on the 2008 xenophobic violence, to what extent did you feel equipped to lead and manage the situation as it impacted on your school?

6. Looking specifically as yourself as an adult learner, what learning needs arose at the time?

7. Do you think these kinds of conflicts (see question 6) are unique to school communities in South Africa? Explain.

8. What is it that you need to learn as an educator in order to respond appropriately to conflict?

9. Would these additional learning needs benefit school leaders globally? Explain

Section C: The ACE School Leadership Programme

10. How has the ACE School Leadership Programme expanded your theoretical knowledge about conflict and diversity within the South African context?

11. What aspects of the programme have you found most useful when you deal with conflict now?

12. Can you give examples of how you have been able to increase social inclusivity of learners and teachers who represent a minority group in the everyday practices of your school? For example, Sotho-speaking learners at a predominantly Xhosa-speaking school or immigrant learners.

13. Has the ACE SL Programme influenced the revision of the following aspects of school management in order to promote social inclusion? Explain.

| School policies | |
| --- | --- |
| Learning programmes | |
| Classroom practice | |
| Relations amongst learners,teacher,parents | |

14. Describe ways in which you were able to use your knowledge and skills which you gained from the programme to diffuse conflict situations within your school context.

| |
| --- |
| |

Section D: Social Reconciliation

15. Social reconciliation refers to mechanisms which people can utilise in order to address conflict or promote conflict-sensitive approaches to conflict. To what extent has the ACE SL curriculum focussed on social reconciliation as a way of dealing with conflict and diversity?

| |
| --- |
| |

16. What strategies and skills have you learnt in the ACE SL Programme to practise social-reconciliatory mechanisms?

| |
| --- |
| |

17. With specific reference to conflict and diversity, does the programme contribute towards educators fulfilling their role as a community, citizen and pastoral care-giver as outlined in the NSE?

| |
| --- |
| |

18. Is there anything that you feel is important to add?

| |
| --- |
| |

Annexure B:  Consent Form

Consent Form

Research Title: Adult learning and social reconciliation: A case study of an academic programme at a Western Cape higher education institution

The intention of this research paper is to investigate whether the ACE School Leadership Programme designed by a Western Cape-based university adequately prepares and equips teachers as agents of social reconciliation within their school communities. In addition, this research paper seeks to investigate whether the Department of Education's policy requirements with specific reference to competences and two specific roles (that of learner mediator and community, citizen and pastoral care-giver) are met in ACE School Leadership Programme.

To this end, my research will focus on the graduates of the 2008 cohort using the Department of Education's course outline (version 6) and the university's programme material. I intend using semi-structured interviews with ten graduates coupled with documentary research such as module descriptors, assessment activities, course material.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. As a respondent, your participation is purely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any stage. You will have access to the recordings and transcriptions which will be stored for a period of five years. Confidentiality and anonymity is crucial to the integrity of this research process. The research will not be used in a way that could be harmful to the school, university or respondent in question.

My supervisor, Professor Groener and I are available for any further questions of clarity which may arise at the following email addresses:

zgroener@uwc.ac.za                vvrleroux@gmail.com

Kindly complete:

I,   ...................................................................................................................
hereby agree to be interviewed for research purposes. I consent to participating in the research on condition that the researcher will:

   maintain confidentiality and anonymity  regarding  respondents and learning institutions.

ANNEXURE C: Letter to participants

Dear ....................

Invitation: Participation in research on the ACE School Leadership Programme

I am reading a Masters in Adult Learning and Global Change at the University of the Western Cape. Currently, I am researching the extent to which the ACE School Leadership Programme prepares school leaders as agents of social reconciliation.

My research is a qualitative case study based on a sample of ten graduates from the same cohort and higher education institution. I would like to interview you as one of the graduates.

I look forward to a favourable response which can be communicated via telephonic or email contact.

Kind regards

Valdi Van Reenen-Le Roux

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