A media discourse analysis of racism in South African schools

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The aim of this paper is to establish, by means of a discourse analysis, how and with what purpose in mind, the printed media, accused of perpetuating racism in South African society, report on racism in education, a social relationship that also seems to be constructed in ways that seem racist. In a micro-context, the following discursive themes have been identified in a study of reports on racial violence in South African schools: Black and white parents, learners and other role players deny that they are racists. The violence in South African schools must therefore be attributed to the racist, violent, inhuman, amoral and unreasonable behaviour of the ‘other’. And if the ‘self’ sometimes acts violently against somebody from a different race (the other), it is justifiable force of fact. Discursive themes on the macro-context of institutions and ideologies allude to the role of politics (apartheid and assimilation).

discourse analysis, racism, education, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Voting in the Republic of South Africa’s (RSA) first democratic elections, concluded on 27 April 1994, brought to power a government of national unity under a Constitution with a strong and explicit anti-racism stance. In spite of significant social and political transformation in post-apartheid South Africa, racism remains part of the South African social fabric (Stevens 1998).

Presentations to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC, 1999, 2000a, 2000b), as well as research (see, inter alia, Newton, 1989; Van Dijk, 1993a, 1987; Oosthuizen, 1982) and publications by journalists (Mathiane, 2000; Die Volksblad, 1995) emphasise the fundamental role that the mass media play in the reproduction and perpetuation of racism. According to Van Dijk (1993a, 1993b), studies in several countries have repeatedly shown that news on racial affairs usually contains a number of stereotypical themes, namely:

- Immigration, with special emphasis on problems, illegality, large numbers, fraud, and demographic or cultural threats.
- Crime, with special emphasis on ‘ethnicised’ or ‘racialised’ crimes such as drug trafficking, mugging, theft, prostitution, hustling, violence or riots.
- Cultural difference, and especially cultural deviance, such as ‘backward’ habits, religious fundamentalism and social problems in racial relations that are explained in terms of assumed cultural properties of minorities.
• Race relations, such as racial tension, discrimination, racial attacks, and other forms of (right-wing) racism, usually defined as regrettable incidents, and often attributed to the presence or behaviour of minorities themselves.

According to Van Dijk (1997), more neutral or positive topics, such as the everyday lives of minorities or their contributions to the economy or culture (with the exception of popular music), tend to be covered less than for the dominant groups.

Racism is an exceptionally complex concept. It is more than the convictions used by an individual or a group to justify discrimination against others. It is not something outside of the individual or group, but an internalised frame of reference which directs the opinion of the individual or the group about himself or herself or themselves and others. It has a direct influence on their deeds and behaviour (see, *inter alia*, Connolly 1998; Richards 1997). Stevens (1998: 205) defines racism as

the unsupported notion that biological hierarchies exist among humans in the form of distinct "races", and attempts to justify the economic, political and social exploitation of certain social exploitation of certain social groups by others. […] It is a pervasive social phenomenon which conceals, contradicts and obscures uneven social relations.

Three levels of racism may be identified: individual, institutional and cultural. *Individual racism* is the personal view that members of one racial group are inferior compared to members of another racial group on the basis of physical differences. *Institutional racism* comes into existence through laws, conventions and practices which reflect racial inequality or has it as a result. *Cultural racism* refers to the view that members of another group have a lesser culture or no culture at all (Connolly 1998; Massey 1991; Nieto 1992; Sedlacek and Brooks 1976). Individual and cultural racism are manifest at a personal and individual level. *Institutional racism* is reflected in the policies and practices of an institution.

The aim of this paper is to establish, by means of a discourse analysis, how and with what purpose in mind, the printed media, accused of perpetuating racism in South African society (SAHRC 1999, 2000a, 2000b), report on racism in education, a social relationship that seems to be constructed in ways that seem racist (Bhana 1999).

In order to achieve the above goal, the paper will focus on the following questions:

• How exactly do the print media in South Africa write about racial conflict in an educational context?

• What do such structures and strategies of discourse tell us about underlying racial prejudices (see Van Dijk 1993b)?

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this paper discourse analysis is employed as an instrument to examine the selected texts. Recent years have witnessed a steady growth and interest in, and a proliferation of writings on, discourse analysis as a method of research (Coulthard, 1985; Renkema, 1993; Sinclair, 1992; Van Dijk, 1993b; Zeeman, 2000). Although historically discourse studies go back to classical rhetoric, most contemporary approaches find their roots between 1965 and 1975 in the new structuralist or formalist approaches to myths, folktales, stories and everyday conversations in anthropology, ethnography, semiotics, literature studies and microsociology (Van Dijk, 1993b). A number of studies undertaken in recent years to research various pertinent social issues, and in particular issues related to ideology, have employed discourse analysis as a research methodology (Duncan, 1996; Lea, 1996; Sonderling, 1998; Stevens, 1998; Van Dijk, 1993b, 1997). The latter emphasises the appropriateness of discourse analysis as a research instrument in studies of prejudice and racism. In his view (Van Dijk,
Discourse analysis does not constitute a single unitary approach, but rather a constellation of different approaches (Lea, 1996). To achieve the objectives of this paper, Terre Blache and Durrheim's (1999) research approach was used to perform a discourse analysis on a selection of newspaper articles (see also Zeeman, 2000, for a synopsis of Terre Blache and Durrheim's methods). Terre Blache and Durrheim (1999: 154) define discourse analysis as ‘... the act of showing how certain discourses are deployed to achieve particular effects in specific contexts’. This definition identifies three different aspects, namely the discourse deployed in a text, how a particular effect is achieved in a text, and lastly the broader context in which the text operates.

DISCOURSE

Discourses are broad patterns of talk - systems of statements - that are taken up in particular speeches and conversations. Thus, various discourses operate in a particular text; put differently, the text draws on, or is informed by, these discourses. Text refers to written and spoken language, as well as images (Terre Blache and Durrheim, 1999).

There are no hard-and-fast methods for identifying discourses and analysing text. To a large extent, discourse analysis involves a way of reading that is made possible by immersion in a particular culture, which provides us with a rich tapestry of ‘ways of speaking’ that one may recognise, ‘read’, and relate to in dialogue context. It is, however, important to extract oneself from living in a culture to reflect on a culture - a discourse analyst must distance him/herself from the text (Terre Blache and Durrheim, 1999).

Terre Blache and Durrheim (1999) identify ‘tricks’ that may assist the researcher in reflecting on textual activities:

- Look for binary oppositions.
- Identify recurrent terms, phrases and metaphors. Each discourse has a particular way of speaking that includes the content of what is said as well as how it is said.
- Identify the subjects that are spoken about in the text.
- In most texts there are an author and a listener. An analyst must imagine what kind of people these have to be.

EFFECTS

Texts are examined for their effects rather than their accuracy; the question is ‘What do texts do?’, not ‘What do texts say?’. Discourses aim to construct particular truths. According to Terre Blache and Durrheim (1999), the authors of texts often want to do a number of things simultaneously: convince the reader that the author of the text is a good person; advance a particular ideology; tell the truth; or motivate the reader to act in a particular way. These aims can be either explicit or implicit.
Discourse analysts may use the above-mentioned tricks as tools to orientate a critical reading of action in texts and show the kind of effects they try to achieve. This involves a skeptical reading of text where the researcher asks:

- Why are these binary oppositions, these terms, phrases and metaphors, and these subjects used?
- What other elements could have been used?
- How were these features of a text used to achieve certain effects?

**CONTEXT**

Although a researcher may want to engage in a detailed reading of a single excerpt of text, his/her aim is most often to provide a reading of a larger body of material. The aim of the analyst is then to examine how discourses operate in a body of text, and this aim is achieved by showing how discourses relate to other discourses, and how they function on different occasions. It is therefore important, in addition to engaging in detailed readings of pieces of text, to read many different texts to show patterns of variation and consistency in discourse. Terre Blachê and Durrheim (1999) stress that ‘... everything is part of every-thing else, so that isolating a text from its surroundings is of necessity already to misunderstand it’. To understand what a text is doing, it should be placed in context.

Discursive research may be divided heuristically into two categories: one that views the text in a micro-context of conversation and debate and another that perceives it in a macro-context of institutions and ideologies (Terre Blachê and Durrheim, 1999).

According to Zeeman (2000), it is impossible for a discourse analyst to be neutral, because he/she is part of a social, cultural and historical context. The analyst is therefore also part of the text's context, and has to account for his/her role relative to the text. Analysts choose certain texts, and decide how to delimit these texts and how to analyse them because they want to achieve certain effects (Terre Blachê and Durrheim, 1999). Terre Blachê and Durrheim (1999: 11) recommend that the analyst must ‘... try to extract him/herself from living in culture, [but] to reflect on culture’.

**THE CORPUS**

The corpus of texts selected for analysis in this paper consists of articles on racism in South African schools which were published in South African newspapers between April 1994 and May 2001. A computer search on 14 May 2001 with a combination of the words *racism* and *education*, indicated that the SABINET's (http://www.sabinet.co.za) SA media search option had 1451 newspaper clippings on the above-mentioned theme available.

Given the exceedingly large number of incidents of racism in education reported regularly in newspapers, and given the fact that when employing discourse analysis as a method of research, it is normally considered ideal not to use samples of too large a size (Duncan, 1996), it was decided to analyse only those articles dealing with incidents of racial violence in schools. The reason for focusing on violence, rather than other forms of racism, is that it is this form of racism on which the media appear to concentrate (Afrikaner, 2000a; Mahlangu, 2000; Van de Graaf, 1995; Van Dijk, 1993b).

In this paper no attention will be paid to editorials because their primary function is to interpret and articulate the significance of specific events for their readers (Fowler, 1991; Helleiner and Szuchewycz, 1997). On the other hand news articles should contain reliable,
undistorted and accurate news and strive to be comprehensive and unbiased (see Froneman 1997; Rapport 2001).

Before reporting on the analysis of the corpus of texts examined, it is important to note that this paper is neither all encompassing nor exhaustive. Given the relatively large size of the body of newspaper reports included in this paper, only the most striking and dominant discursive themes and patterns relating to racism in South African schools are presented. Secondly, these themes are considered striking or distinctive, not in terms of statistical significance, but because of their relative prominence in the discourses analysed (Duncan 1996).

**THE DISCOURSES**

In this study the principle articulated by Riggins (1997) and Stevens (1998), that all individuals within a racist society will necessarily express some degree of ‘racialisation’ within their discourses, will be taken as vantage point when discussing the dominant media discourses on racism in South African schools. The process of ‘racialisation’ plays a role in the distinction between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’. From the discussion of the different discursive themes identified in the texts, it will become clear that while the ‘other’ is invariably negatively perceived, the ‘self’ is positively presented. South Africa is, despite constitutional changes, still racially divided at grassroots level. The ‘self’ and the ‘other’ may thus refer either to whites or blacks.

**Theme 1: Positive self-presentation**

There are few words that elicit a more visceral and defensive response than the accusation of racism (Tatum, 1998). Self-glorification, in comparison with others, is routine in either criticising or denying responsibility with regard to acts of racism (Van Dijk, 1993b, 1997). Within the framework of positive self-presentation, discourses and decisions on racial affairs are premised on principles of humanism, tolerance and equality. However, forces from outside (reality) are seen as an impetus for racial tension, as illustrated by the following two quotations:

> The worst of all is the fact that this school was one of the first schools in Pretoria to become fully integrated (De Lange, 1997: 3).

> While condemning the school violence in Vryburg, the ANC yesterday said that it would continue to extend a hand of friendship to Afrikaners in finding peaceful solutions to the country's problems (The Citizen, 1998: 1).

In the above readings, the ‘self’ (a journalist [De Lange] commenting on racial violence in a Pretoria school and an ANC spokesperson respectively) is described as doing his/her best to improve race relations; it is, however, the ‘other’ who is responsible for racial conflict in schools.

**Theme 2: Negative other-presentation**

An important feature of racism is the notion that hierarchies exist among humans at individual, institutional and cultural levels on the strength of physical and cultural differences. There is thus a clear distinction between the superior ‘self’ and the inferior ‘other’. In the following discussion attention will be paid to the negative portrayal of the ‘other’.

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1 When an individual becomes part of a particular (racist) society, he/she can also reproduce and perpetuate the dominate ideologies to varying degrees (Stevens, 1998).
Theme 2.1: Blacks/Whites are violent

In accordance with national and international studies (see Duncan, 1996; Van Dijk, 1997), a dominant theme emerging from the corpus of texts analysed in this study concerns the portrayal of either the black or the white learners as violence prone.

The following is only a selection of extracts from the sample of newspaper articles depicting whites as violent racists (see Anstey and Ledwaba, 1997; Cornelissen 2001; Die Burger, 1998; Ledwaba, 1999; Mokwena, 2000; Staff Reporter, 2000; for additional examples):

A [black] pupil […] partially lost his sight after a vicious attack by three white schoolmates (Pela, 2000: 5).

A 17-year-old black student was almost beaten to death by his white colleagues (Mahlangu, 2000: 4).

In contrast to the aggressiveness of the white learners, the following reading portrays black learners as passive, and peace-loving:

He [a black learner who was beaten by his fellow learners] said on Thursday morning he went to the rugby field to enjoy the morning breeze when he saw one of his friends being manhandled by a group of white boys. When he intervened one of the white boys turned to him and asked: ‘Who the hell are you to tell us what not to do’ (Mahlangu, 2000: 4).

The media discourse on racism is indicative of the complexity of racial discourse in South Africa. While the excerpts quoted above portray whites negatively, there is also an opposing perspective, namely that blacks are violent racists. These opposing perspectives on the same discourse theme is indicative of the racially divided South African educational milieu. The following quotations portray black learners as out of control and extremely violent youths:

One [white] teacher who allegedly swore at the pupils on a number of occasions was pounced upon by the angry mob, and punched and kicked. The teacher's glasses were smashed in the attack (Bissetty, 1999: 3).

In die aangrensende Huhudi was ’n klein oorlog. Twee polisievoertuie en vier private voertuie is deur woedende inwoners aan die brand gesteek. Sewentien voorvalle van klipgooiery het voorgekom. Die polisie moes leerlinge uitmekaar jaag wat motoriste met klippe bestook het (Die Burger, 1998: 1).²

Uit die voorval [referring to racial conflict in Schweizer-Reneke] blyk ook die ingesteldheid tot geweld van die anderskleuriges (Afrikaner, 1998: 5).³

Dit is die soveelste rasse-aanval aan ’n voormalige Blanke skool waar Swartes Blanke leerlinge aanval. Ernstige beurings is al in die proses opgedoen, alhoewel genadiglik nog geen Blanke leerling gesterf het nie. Daar kan verwag word dat as hierdie rassistiese Swart aanvalle op Blanke leerlinge voortgaan, daar vroeër of later ’n noodlottige voorval moet plaasvind (Afrikaner, 2000b: 12)⁴.

Typical of the two preceding quotations is the use of over-generalisations and negative stereotyping of blacks as violent racists (‘people of colour's inclination towards violence’, ‘racist blacks’ and ‘the umpteenth attack of black learners on whites’).

² In the adjoining Huhudi township a small war broke out. Two police and four private vehicles were set alight. Seventeen cases of stone throwing were reported. The police had to disperse youths who were throwing stones at vehicles.

³ This incident [referring to racial conflict at Schweizer-Reneke] illustrates people of colour's inclination toward violence.

⁴ It is the umpteenth incident of racism in a former white school. Black learners attacked their fellow white learners. Some learners have sustained serious injuries, luckily at this stage, none of the white learners have died. It is inevitable that, if these attracts on white learners continue, it will one day be fatal.
What is very striking about the texts analysed is the remarkable consistency with which words belonging to the lexical register of anger and anarchy are used; e.g., ‘flashpoints of tension’ (Anstey and Ledwaba, 1997: 5); ‘toy-toying’ (Anstey and Ledwaba, 1997: 5); ‘a few mobbed the officials’ (Anstey and Ledwaba, 1997: 5); ‘brawl’ (The Star, 1997: 5); ‘pandemonium broke out’ (Bissetty, 1999: 3); ‘the angry mob’ (Bissetty, 1999: 3); ‘pupils tried to set alight two schoolrooms’ (Bissetty, 1999: 3); ‘armed with teargas and rubber bullets’ (City Press, 1997: 3); ‘die dorp is ‘n kruitvat’ (Die Burger, 1998: 1); and ‘all hell broke loose’ (Mboyane, 2000: 4).

The differential representation of blacks and whites by the white dominated and more liberal, black orientated newspapers respectively, should be viewed as integrally linked to either the justification function of the ideology of racism or critique against white people who oppose school integration in post-apartheid South Africa (compare Duncan 1996: 174). This differential representation will also be examined in the next section.

**Theme 2.2: Blacks/Whites are racists**

A prominent feature of modern racism, according to Duncan (1996), is that ‘... the victims or targets of racism themselves are currently frequently accused of being racist or, in fact, being the cause of racism’. The following quotation labels blacks in no uncertain terms as racists:

Rapport verneem dat die meerderheid kinders by die skool is opgesweep deur die swart personeel en koshuisbeamptes wat veronderstel is om die kinders te beheer. Slagspreuke van apartheid en rassisme is geskree, terwyl vergadering gehou is (Coetzee, 1997: 3).

A contradictory perspective is presented by a City Press reporter (1997: 3) in his/her covering of the same incident. This newspaper's headline reads: ‘Chaos as 100 [black] kids break out of racist reformatory’.

In the two preceding quotations we have the same incident, as well as the same discursive theme, namely to label somebody as a racist, but we have two completely different scapegoats. But who are the racists? The black or the white staff members? The aim of discourse analysis is not to discover the truth, but to acknowledge the existence of different and even conflicting interpretations and representations (Zeeman, 2000).

**Theme 2.3: Blacks/Whites are inhuman and/or amoral**

In a sub-theme of negative other-representation, whites are not only constituted as violent racists, but also as inhuman. This discursive theme is illustrated by the following selection of quotations extracted from the texts:

[A white father] grabbed me [an eight year old coloured boy] by the neck and butted me with his forehead in my eye. I was bleeding after the incident (Monare, 1999: 1).

Hart [a white boy] got infuriated and dragged him [the black boy] by his tie and punched him twice on the forehead and the ear. All hell broke loose when other blacks tried to defend Tlagae. Hart's white friends joined the fracas; punching and kicking him (Tlagae) on his back [...] Later on Tlagae, who was bleeding profusely as a result of the punch-up, was allegedly dragged by a school prefect to the principal's office with Hart marching alongside (Mboyane, 2000: 4).

The above selection of quotations reduces whites to violent, inhuman racists who should be restrained from acts of violence. Highly emotive words are used to describe the pain and...
humiliation black learners have suffered at their hands. The description of the fight between Hart and Tlagae is illustrative of overcompleteness in discourses. Seemingly irrelevant, negative information is given in order to dehumanise the actions of the white boys and educators.

A reading of two extremist Afrikaans newspapers, *Die Patriot* and *Afrikaner*, reveals that, as presented in the statements below, black learners are without any moral values:

- Hulle [het hulle] oorgegee aan hul welluste deur dagga openlik te gebruik, en ook het van hulle oop en bloot op die gras van die skool seksueel met mekaar verkeer (Van de Graaf, 1995:2).
- Talle [wit] meisies [is] al deur swartes lastig geval […] en heelparty van hulle betas. […] Behalwe die fisiese optrede teen die blanke meisies, word daar ook voortdurend, veral tydens pouses, vulgêre taal teenoor hulle gebesig (*Afrikaner*, 1999: 1)

In the two preceding quotations, black learners are described in harsh, negative lexical style. They reportedly engage in petty crime, sexual misconduct, abuses and harassment, as well as verbal vulgarities and abuses. Black learners are described in derogatory terms as ‘criminals’ and ‘animals’.

**Theme 2.4: Whites are unreasonable**

Another important discursive theme which may be discerned in the texts analysed, conveys the message that whites are basically highly unreasonable, and it is because of their unreasonable behaviour that there are so many racial incidents in South African schools. In an article dealing with racism and the violent actions of white parents, one of the white parents is quoted as asking:

> I don't know why they [the black learners] must go to white schools. Why can't they go back to Soweto or somewhere else? (Eveleth, 1997: 6)

In response to this question, a black parent is quoted as saying:

> If you want better education for your children, you will take them to the best school you can. […] Those whites who say we must go back to Atteridgeville, Soshanguve and Garankuwa, but what must we do if the schools are full? (Eveleth, 1997: 6).

Through the voices of the parents, opposing perspectives are presented in Eveleth's report, creating the impression that the newspaper article is neutral, but the sound argumentation of the black parent is contrasted with the illogical, unreasonable rhetorical question of the white parent.

**Theme 3: Denial of racism**

A common feature of media discourse on racism is either the denial of racist attitudes and actions by whites in the former white schools or that these schools are doing their utmost to eradicate racism. Consider, for example, the following two headlines of articles dealing with racial tension in schools:

- Edenvale school moves to stamp out any racism (*Naidu*, 1999: 10).

In several newspaper articles, either the principal, members of governing bodies or community leaders are quoted, saying that the reported incidents of violent clashes between

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7 They gave heed to their basic urges - they smoked marijuana on the school premises. Furthermore they gave way to their sexual urges on the school's playground.
8 A number of white girls were subjected to sexual harassment and verbal abuse by black learners.
9 Student leaders believe groups must speak to one another.
white and black learners were not racially motivated (see, for example, Cape Argus, 2000: 4; The Star, 1997: 6; Thompson, 1998: 1; Waldner, 2000: 1). Below are two examples of such denials:

[The principal] denied that the tension at the school could be described as racial, and said it was normal in any school for children to fight (De Lange, 1997: 3).

[The principal] said suggestions that the incident was racially motivated were ‘sensation seeking’ (Mboyane, 2000: 4).

Van Dijk (1997: 37) points out that the common strategy of denying racism is to transfer racism as ‘popular resentment’ to the white lower class. The following excerpts are from the analysed texts:

Elandspoort is in Danville, a working-class Pretoria West suburb which for years has been the target of scorn among well-heeled Pretorians. But if those from the northern suburbs want nothing to do with Danville residents, Danville residents want nothing to do with children from the nearby townships of Atteridgeville - especially those from affluent homes (Anstey and Ledwaba, 1997: 5).

Black students attending school in a working-class Afrikaans suburb of Pretoria West should 'go back to Soweto', said a white parent standing guard outside Elandspoort High School (Eveleth, 1997: 6).

To highlight their stance that not all whites, but the white lower or working class must be held responsible for racial incidents in South African schools, Anstey and Ledwaba (1997: 5) wrote that ‘... some of the white parents drank beer [and] some were intoxicated’.

The denial of one's own racism may be accompanied by various forms of transfer. These are characterised by other types of discourse; for example, when a newspaper article uses euphemism when writing about racial tension at a school: ‘... like many wars, it was sparked by a simple incident’ (Anstey and Ledwaba, 1997: 5). Furthermore, not all white South Africans reportedly are racists, but only those belonging to the ultra right-wing political parties (Southern African Report, 1996; Thompson, 1998) or to gangs (De Lange, 1997). Racism in schools is thus attributed to groups of whites who are not to be taken seriously (Duncan, 1996).

**Theme 4: Justification: the force of facts**

Negative actions, or even making derogatory remarks about others, are justified by referring to the ‘force of facts’. The lack of discipline, the lack of pro-active response from educators against perpetrators of racism, hate language, and reactive steps in retaliating to verbal or physical abuse, are some of the ‘good reasons’ used to justify tactics that may be viewed as negative. The aim of such a discourse of justification is to present the speaker and/or writer as free of prejudice or even as a victim of so-called ‘reverse prejudice’ (Wodak, 1997). In the next section, attention will be paid to a few sub-themes in the discourse of justification.

**Theme 4.1: Lack of discipline**

In the following examples, the quotations not only imply momentary loss of control and hence less responsibility, but also encapsulate excuses for loss of temper and despondency. The incident should thus be seen as a regrettable spot on an otherwise unblemished past of racial tolerance.

White pupils, who did not want to be named, said the teacher told the two Std. 7 pupils to keep quiet during the opening ceremony on Monday. They had cursed at her, ‘So we decided to teach her a lesson’ (The Star, 1997: 6).
Die blanke leerlinge sê dat hulle nie langer die uittartende houding van die swartes gaan duld nie (*Afrikaner*, 1999: 1).

From the above quotations, it is clear that there is sympathy for white learners and educators who take the law into their own hands - they seemingly had no alternative. Parallel to this 'force of fact' discursive theme, another discursive theme may be identified, namely the negative stereotyping of black learners as undisciplined and unruly.

**Theme 4.2: Cultural differences**

According to Lea (1996), modern racial discourses seldom involve the crude pseudo-scientific racism of the nineteenth century (see, *inter alia*, Drew, 1995; Massey, 1991; Richards 1997). Today, reference to the biological basis of race is often cloaked in culturalist arguments. Groups are seen as striving to safeguard their traditions and cultural identity (*Van Dijk* 1997). The discourse of culturalism will be illustrated in the following extracts in which the emphasis on cultural differences is integrally linked to the justificatory function of the ideology of racism:

> Ons is verskillend en ons kom uit verskillende agtergronde. […] Elke groep het sy eie kultuur (*Rapport*, 1997: 12).11

> Hierdie lokasie-maniere kan nie geduld word nie (*Afrikaner*, 1998: 5).12

Before a black learner was beaten up by his white fellow learners, he was told that Bryanston High School ‘was not a township school’ (*Mokwena*, 2000: 2).

Typical of the preceding quotations is the use of over-generalisations; for example, the reference to township manners and conflicting cultures. In these quotations blacks are perceived as threatening to the white's cultural identity. This discursive theme is closely linked to cultural racism, namely that members of another group have a lesser or no culture at all. Institutional racism is thus justified on cultural grounds.

**Theme 4.3: Reactive steps**

Another sub-theme in the discourse on the justification of violence is the right to use violence in retaliating against verbal and/or physically abuse - especially hate language. The following are two quotations from the corpus of texts in which the use of hate language against black learners was the justification for violence against their fellow white learners (see Bissetty, 1999: 3; Mokwenga, 2000: 2; *The Citizen*, 2000: 9; for additional examples):

*He declared that he felt no guilt about the incident [a black pupil who stabbed a white fellow pupil with a pair of scissors]. The twenty year old pupil claimed he was surrounded by a group of white pupils after fellow pupil […] allegedly confronted him at the schools tuckshop, grabbed him by the neck and said 'Kaffirs moet nie hier koop nie' (Kaffirs must not buy here) (Sylvester, 1999: 5).*

*On Wednesday a fight broke out on a school bus after white pupils called blacks goetes [sic] (things) (Ledwaba and Sakuneka, 1999:1).*

Not only black learners, but also white learners react violently when confronted with hate language:

*Hulle [the parents of a white boy who broke a coloured girl's jaw] sê Lee-Andra het hul seun blykbaar voor die bors gestamp, gedreig om hom tussen die bene te skop en sy ma gevloek (Cornelissen, 2001: 7).13*

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10 The white learners said that they will no longer tolerate the provocative conduct of black learners.

11 We are different and have different backgrounds. […] Every group has its own culture.

12 These township manners cannot be tolerated.

13 The parents of the boy who broke a coloured girl’s jaw, said that the girl had allegedly pushed their boy
In the following quotations, (white) parents are depicted as people who will go to extremes to defend other (white) parents and their children (the self) against acts of aggression by the ‘other’:

In retaliation [to the fact that black learners kept members of a schools governing body hostage], a large group of angry White parents gathered at the school gates … and started attacking Black pupils as they entered the grounds (The Citizen, 1998: 1).

Gewapen met sambokke, swepe en tuingereedskap het hulle [white parents] besluit om hulle kinders te beskerm (Van de Graaf, 1995: 2)\textsuperscript{14}.

In the ‘force of facts’ discursive theme the ‘self’ is portrayed as inherently peace-loving, anti-racist, law-abiding learners and parents. However, external factors, for example the lack of discipline and violent behaviour of the ‘other’, forced them to take steps to defend their own.

**Theme 5: Political discourses**

A prominent feature of South African politics is the emphasis on racial differences. The political history of South Africa up to 1994 was dominated by two political themes, namely the justification of apartheid and the fight against apartheid. The constitutional changes in the country did not bring about a change in these conflicting discourses (The Citizen, 1999; The Evening Post, 1985). The texts analysed abound with statements holding the ANC government’s educational policy responsible for the racial conflict in schools:

Right-wing groupings yesterday blamed government policies for the fiction at the school. They sharply criticise the government for refusing to recognise cultural differences in its education policy. The conflict could be defused by allowing culturally-based, mother-tongue education for different groups […] We call on government to stop exposing the country’s youth to conflict for the sake of achieving its political ideals (The Citizen, 1997: 3; compare with Afrikaner, 1998: 5; Coetzee, 2000: 2; Thompson 1998: 1; for similar argumentation).

In the preceding quotation, the ANC dominated government is accused of reversed racism. According to Stevens (1998) the use of this accusation in political discourse may be seen as a defensive manoeuvre not only to deny the inequalities caused by apartheid, but also their own racist prejudice. It is furthermore an attempt to preserve the positive self-image of the group. Stevens (1998) argues that the emphasis on the reversal of discrimination and racism may be seen as an attempt to suggest that ‘we are the real victims’.

Another recurring theme in political discourse is that whites are unwilling to accept the political realities of post-apartheid South Africa:

Blacks believe they have every right to be in the school, while whites regard it as a sacred institution of Afrikanerdom (Ledwaba, 1999: 4).

**Sunday World** (1999: 2) goes a step further. The conflict at Kuschke Agricultural School is linked to the apartheid struggle:

Did our parents, relatives and friends, who fought a gallant struggle to protect black dignity in Sharpeville in 1960, die in vain? Was the blood of our children in 1976 spilled for us to continue sustaining racial insults?

The frustrations of black learners, parents and community leaders are reflected in these rhetorical questions. Their ‘parents, relatives and friends’ have fought against apartheid, but nothing has changed in post-apartheid South Africa - they are still in a subservient position.

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\textsuperscript{14} Armed with sjambokke, whips and garden tools, the white parents decided to defend their children.
The reference to South Africa's legacy of apartheid enables speakers to make evaluations and to assign responsibility and guilt. The aim of such a discourse is to present the speaker as free of prejudice and as a victim of prejudice and discrimination (see Wodak, 1997):

The schisms deliberately created by the apartheid regime by exploiting, in particular, ethnic and tribal differences, cannot be expected to disappear overnight (Thakur, 1997: 5).

The anti-apartheid political discourse not only highlights the perceived unwillingness of some whites to accept the political and educational realities in post-apartheid South Africa, but also the frustration of blacks with the fact that circumstances have not changed at grassroots level.

Theme 6: The disempowerment of blacks

A relatively strong discursive theme is that blacks are still disempowered at grassroots level despite the constitutional changes in South Africa. From the sampled texts, it becomes clear that blacks often perceive themselves as victims of the past, as well as the present:

The victims father, Lasarus Joseph, question the school's understanding of basic human rights. "What are the human rights of a pupil who is assaulted at school in this manner? This is supposed to be a safe environment. [...] This is ridiculous. It is different strokes for different folks because the other boy happens to be white?" (Cape Argus, 2000: 4; see Ledwaba, 1999: 4 for the same view).

A concluding remark by Bissetty (1998: 3) reads:

Many of the parents who spoke to the Daily News said racism appeared to be rife at the school, with mostly African children bearing the brunt of the discrimination.

A text in the City Press (1997: 3) reads:

The [black] children escaped as hordes of policemen stormed the Vikelwa Reformatory School armed with teargas and rubber bullets after demonstrations by black inmates against racism.

Furthermore, it is reported that the police are unwilling to protect black learners:

Swart leiers is ontevrede oor die polisie-optrede en sê hulle het glad nie die swart kinders gehelp toe blanke ouers hulle met sambokke geslaan het nie (De Kock, 1998: 12).15

The texts quoted above confirm Stevens's (1998) observation that black people in South Africa express a certain degree of entitlement in post-apartheid South Africa, because there has not been a fundamental change in the circumstances of the majority of people. The texts abound with feelings of resentment and disillusionment.

IN CONCLUSION

If Froneman's (1997: 11) observation that news ‘... is not merely a mirror of society, but it does present to society a mirror of its concerns and interests’ holds true, this discourse analysis has shown that racism is an integral part of the South African educational scene. In micro-context, the following conversations and debates have been identified: Black and white parents, learners and other role players deny that they are racists. The violence in South African schools must therefore be attributed to the racist, violent, inhuman, amoral and unreasonable behaviour of the ‘other’. And if the ‘self’ sometimes acts violently against somebody from a different race (the ‘other’), it is justifiable force of fact. Discursive themes on the macro-context of institutions and ideologies revolve around the role of politics (apartheid and assimilation) in racial violence in South African schools.

15 Black leaders are enraged about police action. According to them the police did nothing to protect the learners when the white parents attacked them with sjamboks.
A relatively large percentage of the selected text focused on the verbal reaction category in the newspaper articles. Not only the ‘expert’ opinions of group leaders, but also the opinions of learners and parents directly or indirectly involved in the violent clashes were considered. According to Van Dijk (1993b: 114), journalists often use quotations when the ‘... topic is rather delicate, such as discrimination or prejudice’. A perception may be created that the journalist/editor is neutral. But in the final analysis, it is the journalist/editor's decision to whom he/she is going to give a voice. From the study it has become clear that there are two conflicting perspectives in the media discourse on racism in South African schools. Who is discriminated against, who is racially abused, whose human rights are violated, will depend on who belongs to ‘our’ people (either black or white). In the analysis of the corpus of texts, little analysis was necessary to identify the perspectives and points of view of journalists who wrote the different newspaper articles and the persons given a voice in these articles. Most of them openly defended their points of view, and severely attacked and marginalised those they opposed.

A media discourse analysis on racism in South African schools presupposes a prior knowledge of South Africa's educational history. Without an insight into the apartheid education system, the apartheid ideology, the ANC's overt and covert political campaigns since its inception at the beginning of the twentieth century, political and educational promises made to blacks and whites before the first democratic election in 1994, it is not always possible to grasp the frustrations and, fears of black and white South Africans with regard to education in post-apartheid South Africa.

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