Violence in South African Schools[1]

Salim Vally
Educational Policy Unit
University of the Witwatersrand

with
Yolanda Dolombisa and Kim Porteus

Introduction

While the world was riveted by the media coverage of the horrific massacre of 13 high school students in the United States in April of this year, the litany of violent acts in South African schools this year alone far surpassed in number the tragedy in Colorado. In the past three months alone, educators, parents, and students alike have been murdered in South African schools: a school principal murdered in Soweto; a pre-school teacher murdered in full view of sixty children in Gauteng; Rose Mnisi murdered as she walked home from her school in the Northern Province; a school bus driver murdered in the presence of 85 learners; a Grade 12 pupil stabbed by a fellow student; and a parent shot while waiting in his car for his daughter outside her secondary school after the principal and his deputy shot at pupils who allegedly intended to attack teachers.

The high level of violence in our schools reflects a complicated combination of past history and recent stresses--on individual, school, and community levels--in a society marked by deep inequities and massive uncertainty and change within school operations. Despite the end of the apartheid in South Africa, "race" and ethnic tensions remain at the center of much of the violence in the country[2]. Even with the enormous political changes that have taken place in South Africa since 1994, numerous social and economic challenges remain. In schooling for example, although various policies have been unveiled and legislation enacted to hasten desegregation, the incidence of racial rancour in many school communities attests to the intractable and continuing violence in South African schools. Over the past few years, there have been multiple outbursts in Vryburg, Groblersdal, Trompsburg, Richmond (Northern Cape), Potgietersrust, Christiana, and Delmas, as well as in Pretoria and in Johannesburg.

The long shadow of apartheid ideology, to borrow the title of an article on "open" schools written before the 1994 elections (Carrim, Mkwanazi and Nkomo, 1993), continues to cast its Stygian gloom, no longer through racially explicit policies, but by proxy: high school fees, exclusionary language and admission policies, and other transparent maneuvers such as "crowding out" black learners by bussing-in white learners from outside the feeder area.

Confronted with sporadic eruptions of overt prejudice and faced with persistent reports and complaints of a pervasive and insidious racism in many schools, the South African Human Rights Commission (henceforth SAHRC) embarked on a study of human rights, prejudice, racial conflict and racial integration in public schools. The SAHRC study, Racism, Racial Integration and Desegregation in South African Public Secondary Schools (1999) is the first national study on racism and integration in schools. It seeks not only to

examine overt racial manifestations and practices that prevent integration but also the more elusive, but nonetheless inhibiting, visceral and inferential forms of racism. While the study unsurprisingly shows that subtle racism is ubiquitous and has the ability to mutate and adapt in post-1994 South Africa, it also reveals shockingly crude practices of racism and race-related violence, all the more startling because of its prevalence. Excerpts of the SAHSRC study are used in this article to illustrate the relationship between racism and violence in South African schools.

This article begins to illustrate the ways in which violence currently impacts schools in South Africa. It addresses the ways in which violence remains intertwined with racism in South African schools, the effects of violence on teachers, and the resulting impact of violence on the classroom practice of teachers (often in the form of corporal punishment), which often creates a culture of violence in the schools themselves.

Racism and schooling
The SAHRC report contributes to a steadily burgeoning corpus of recent local and regional studies on the same issue. (See, for example, Christie, 1990; Carrim, 1992, 1998; Naidoo, 1996a; Akhurst, 1997; Zinn, 1997; Duncan, 1998; Soudien, 1998; Zafar, 1998; Carrim and Soudien, 1999.) The SAHRC study confirms the view of these authors that racism persists in schools despite school desegregation. Indeed, Carrim (1998) notes that almost five years after 1994 there is still no nationally instituted anti-racist program or violence prevention package in place in the schools; there are no structured programs to help teachers cope with multi-racial/cultural/lingual/ability classrooms; and there are no nationally or provincially coordinated programs for students to develop anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-discrimination awareness or violence prevention in the formal workings of the school. It is almost as if these are expected to occur almost entirely of their own accord. The SAHRC report explains that if a coherent school desegregation policy is not developed, the status quo will remain intact, racial and ethnic tensions will mount and lead to bitter disputes and direct confrontation (Zafar, 1998).

A primary goal of the SAHRC study was to acknowledge racism as a structural feature of society and to examine racism in a historical context. The writers of the SAHRC report support the view that racial inequality in schools is not merely an aberration or a result of cultural ignorance or misunderstanding; it is structurally linked to wider social relations and the economic, political and social fabric of society. As Aldous Huxley stated, in reply to Nazi propaganda: "[Racism] is a cloak for selfish economic aims which in their uncloaked nakedness would look ugly enough."

The apartheid education system engineered race, class, gender and ethnic categories to serve and reinforce the political economy of the racial capitalist system. Present-day racism and violence in education in South Africa must be understood with reference to this history and to contemporary political and economic disadvantage and patterns of inequality in society. Racism in education does not constitute an autonomous form of oppression, but rather is inextricably linked to power relations and reproduced in conjunction with class, gender and ethnic inequalities. The wider context in which racism is generated is therefore important; even if sound anti-racist educational policies for the classroom, corridor and playground are developed, this will not be enough to eradicate racism and violence from society. What happens outside the school gates will

inevitably impact on the gains made in schools. Despite the requirement of long-term structural change to effectively eradicate this culture of violence, we do not wish to imply that inequalities in schools cannot be mitigated in the short term. On the contrary, a number of strategies for racial integration can and must be employed if fundamental rights are not to be breached--even within the constraints of present social relations. We share Gillborn's (1995) conviction that particularly in South Africa the education system has the ability to challenge racism and produce long-lasting effects on students and, in turn, on their communities.

The legacy of racial segregation in South African schools
Through the legislative provisions contained in the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the Extension of University Education Act of 1959, the Coloured Persons Act of 1963, the Indian Education Act of 1965 and the National Education Act of 1967, education for black South Africans was explicitly linked to the political, economic and social domination of all black South Africans. The first school for slaves in 1658 and schools throughout the colonial period were designed to fit black South Africans into subordinate positions in a racially-structured self-perpetuating division of labor.

Formal schooling in South Africa is rooted in both the mission and colonial systems of education. In the 1950s Verwoerd introduced the notorious "Bantu Education" system of schooling for "Africans," supplanting missionary control of education with that of a state committed to white supremacy and the pursuit of these policies through education.

Expansion of primary, secondary and higher education for "Africans" in the 1960s and 1970s occurred in the context of the development of bantustan policy, in which "African" political aspirations were to be redirected to artificial and economically nonviable "homelands." Educational funds were allocated unequally to children administered under "white," "Indian," "Coloured," "African" and other bantustan education departments. But the expansion of poor quality education resulted in massive political resistance among youth, who resisted state-prescribed educational goals and regulation throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Reform efforts failed. First, the 1981 de Lange Commission of Inquiry was attacked. Then, in 1986, the then Minister of National Education, F.W. de Klerk, announced a ten year plan to finance upgrading black education. In 1989 he admitted the plan had failed: a sluggish economy was unable to provide the necessary funds to keep pace with the increasing numbers of students. Thus, enrolments at primary and especially secondary levels increased sharply while, simultaneously, resources were being squeezed.

In the 1980s, the private provision of education grew in South Africa (as elsewhere) in response to the inability or unwillingness of state schools to admit black children. The majority of black children who failed matriculation examinations were not reabsorbed into the system; age restrictions on entry to secondary schools had been imposed in the early 1980s. As a result private schools began opening their doors to increasing numbers of black children, but prohibitive fees meant that they were restricted to children whose parents could afford the fees. In the 1980s, "alternative schools"--whose fees and standards varied as widely as their ability to sustain themselves--also mushroomed to absorb increasing numbers of children. Pressure to open white schools increased in

major centers like Cape Town and Johannesburg in 1989. In 1990, white schools were permitted to admit black students under limited conditions which included a provision that the school remain 51 percent white and that the "ethos and character" of the school be maintained.

In black schools, apartheid education meant minimal levels of resources, inadequately trained and few staff, poor quality of learning materials, shortages of classrooms, and the absence of laboratories and libraries. Besides these tangible deprivations, schools also inculcated unquestioning conformity, rote learning, autocratic teaching, authoritarian management styles, syllabi replete with racism and sexism, and antiquated forms of assessment and evaluation (Vally, 1998).

Schools were fragmented into 19 different education departments and funding varied on the basis of race. In 1986 per capita subsidies for "whites" were R2,365 compared with R572 for Africans in Department of Education and Training schools[3]. Per capita subsidies in the homelands were even lower, with KwaZulu-Natal the lowest at R262. Although there was an increase in real spending per pupil between 1985 and 1992, which was an attempt to close racial gaps in funding, by 1992 spending for white pupils was still four times that of spending for African students. In 1993, average spending per pupil was R4,700 for whites compared with R1,440 for Africans (Chisholm, Vally and Motala, 1998).

Reforms in education
Even though segregation has been strictly enforced since 1948, following the 1976 SOWETO Uprising, the South African Catholic Bishops Conference decided to defy apartheid educational legislation and enroll black students in Catholic schools. In the 1970s as well, private schools traditionally catering to an elite group of South Africans also enrolled black students. These were usually the children of African diplomats, black South African government officials, or exceptionally wealthy black parents (Carrim et al., 1993). Limited desegregation of white state schools began in 1990, and Coloured and Indian schools began to admit African students in 1985, even though this practice was officially illegal until 1990. In October 1990, the Minister of (white) Education in the House of Assembly, Piet Clase, announced the possibility that white state schools might legally admit black pupils. To do this, white school parent communities needed to vote on the issue. Schools were required to achieve an 80 percent poll, out of which they needed to obtain a 72 percent majority. Schools were given the option to vote for one of three models, known as the Clase models (for a summary of these models see Carrim, Mkwanazi and Nkomo, 1993).

Although unrestricted formal desegregation by decree came into being in 1993, there were 60,000 black students at Model C schools already and about 40,000 African and coloured students in Indian schools[4]. By the end of 1995 the number of African students at Coloured, white and Indian schools did not exceed 15 percent (or approximately 200,000) of the total student enrolment at these schools. (See Race Relations Survey, 1994/1995; Naidoo, 1996a.)

There have also been other important developments. For example, both the South African Constitution and the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 have had a pivotal impact on school desegregation. The SASA preamble states:

WHEREAS the achievement of democracy in South Africa has consigned to history the past system of education which was based on racial inequality and segregation; and WHEREAS this country requires a new national system for schools which will redress the past injustices in educational provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination....WHEREAS it is necessary to set uniform norms and standards for the education of learners at schools and throughout the Republic of South Africa.

The SASA repealed all apartheid legislation pertaining to schools, abolished corporal punishment and admissions tests, codified compulsory education for children between the ages of 7 and 15 and provided the framework for a unified school system.

School integration, racism and violence
Although post-1994 educational legislation created the policy framework for the full integration of public schooling, social, economic and demographic barriers limit the possibilities for full integration. For example, school fees in most of the former white schools are prohibitive for most black parents, and this is compounded by transport (the effects of "group areas" and residential segregation remain) and other inhibiting issues. Desegregation neither addresses the material needs of the vast majority of learners nor dramatically changes the racialised patterns of schooling. However, the new legislation nevertheless begins to address the long-term consequences of educational stratification in South Africa by providing a growing, albeit limited, proportion of urban black learners with access to better-resourced facilities. Yet even the schools that are beginning to desegregate retain a racialised character.

Based on an illuminating study on school choice by working-class parents, Hoadley (1998) writes:

> Schooling is…delineated largely in terms of class. The dramatic changes in composition of some schools since the opening up of the school system can broadly be described as follows. Middle class black and white students have moved to independent schools and privileged state schools, freeing up spaces in "boundary schools" (former Model C schools on the borders of historical group areas), which have been taken up largely by middle and lower middle class black, coloured and Indian students.

The SAHRC 1999 study confirms that while desegregation allows learners from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds to access education, they primarily accommodate the values, needs and aspirations of learners from the racial group for which these schools were originally established. Learners from other racial groups are simply expected to assimilate into the prevailing ethos of these schools (Duncan, 1998). The racial values and practices of many communities still remain and are reflected in the various schools.

Quite often these values and practices remain unambiguously chauvinistic and deeply authoritarian. The SAHRC study has found schools which are contradicting not only constitutional provisions and basic human rights, but also numerous education policies, laws and regulations. For example, the admissions policy of a school in the Free State sets out its "character, values, culture, medium of instruction and structure of authority" which learners must follow. Linked to the question of school integration are the issues of teacher preparation, background or experience in integrated schooling. As schools become more integrated, are teachers prepared to address the "character, values, culture" and languages of students who are now in their classrooms? Moreover, as the next section explains, some of the policies regarding teachers have rendered school desegregation far more complex.

A culture of violence
School violence and teaching
One of the key features of educational reform in South Africa has been the retrenchment and redeployment of teachers. Under this policy many teachers have been laid-off because of severe budget cuts, often causing teacher shortages in some schools and severe overcrowding of classrooms. In addition, some teachers have been relocated to remote or under-served parts of the country. This year the redeployment of teachers considered to be in "excess" sparked off a wave of violence across South Africa[5]. Police shot two pupils at Ilinge High in Vosloorus during a dispute over the time-tabling of subjects. According to the chairperson of the school's Learner Representative Council, the redeployment of teachers led to the scheduling of many subjects in the same period causing pupils to miss lessons. During the ensuing protests by students, the school's management called in the police, ultimately resulting in greater violence, and several pupils were shot. Learners, who accused their principals of being responsible for the pending redeployment of teachers from their schools, seriously injured the principals of Zamdola and Dumezweni Secondary Schools. Incensed learners from Ntombizodwa and Siyajabula Secondary schools in Katlehong boycotted classes and stoned cars in protest of the dismissal of temporary teachers and the redeployment process.

Moreover, harassment by gangs led to a stay-away by the entire teaching staff from Vuyiswa Mtolo in Kwa Mashu, Durban[6]. The teachers protested the violent assault of their principal and the shooting of a pupil on the school premises on the first day of the school year. Teachers at a school that achieved a nine percent matriculation rate (secondary school) last year claimed that armed gangsters regularly arrive at school to rob teachers and pupils. Fearful of being accosted, many teachers arrive late at school and leave early. An armed gang also attacked Mqhawe High in Durban and caused extensive damage by setting the main building on fire. The rampant violence against students and school staff has been pervasive, disruptive and has severely impeded South Africa's schools in their efforts to improve education and address issues of equity in communities where it is most needed.

Responding with violence
In reaction to the violence in schools many have called for the reintroduction of punitive discipline such as corporal punishment, and absurdly, the censorship of the popular Yizo-Yizo Department of Education sponsored television series, which realistically

depicted violence in schools. The KwaZulu-Natal Education Minister, Eileen Shandu, during her term in office openly flouted the Constitution and education legislation by supporting corporal punishment, which is now a criminal act[7]. It is not surprising therefore that many schools in Kwa Zulu-Natal openly practice corporal punishment. A school in this province lists corporal punishment in its disciplinary procedure and notes instances of corporal punishment on a form titled "Biblical Correction Release."[8] Numerous studies have shown that, far from curbing violence, corporal punishment in fact encourages anti-social aggression, vandalism and perpetuates the cycle of violence.

According to many learners, punishment is an integral part of a persistent racist ethic (SAHRC Report, 1999). Countless learners refer to unjust and/or undue punishment while others are reprimanded mildly or not at all. While black learners acquire demerits, suspension or expulsion for minor misdemeanors, white learners who commit similar or worse offences are released.

In a recent and striking case of corporal punishment, a teacher broke the arm of a six-year-old learner for sleeping during a lesson[9]. Sexual violence also continues unabatedly. Findings by a women's abuse shelter revealed that 75 percent of pupils from six schools in Soweto had direct experience of a rape and 40 percent of rape victims did not report the attack to police.[8] Preliminary results from a study investigating sexual violence among South African children (N=1200) (MRC, 1999) conclude that 30 percent of girls who were raped, were raped by a school teacher.

School security
Cash-strapped provincial education departments offer security services to schools with either inadequate or no security. The Gauteng Education Department (in Johannesburg) though, budgeted R5 million (approximately $1million) for various security arrangements, such as panic buttons linked to police stations. Security fencing, burglar guards and alarm systems are only provided to schools that have expensive equipment, and these are usually schools in wealthier areas. A spokesperson for the Gauteng MEC encouraged schools to pay for their own guards and to obtain the services of security companies linked to armed reaction units[10]. One school on the Cape Flats installed an electric fence around its perimeter to prevent gang related acts of violence and vandalism, however learners in the school have been thrown against the fence by fellow learners[11]. A more useful initiative is the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation's "40 Schools Project."[12] The project initially began as a program to help learners, educators and parents to cope with the effects of violence, abuse and trauma in schools. It has now expanded to include the training of counsellors and deals with ways of making schools safe spaces. The Institute for Women's Development has also begun recruiting peer counsellors to break the culture of silence around sexual abuse in Soweto schools[13].

Conclusion with recommendations
Clearly the violent atmosphere in South African schools is a reflection of the broader society. The solution in the long term is to address the socio-economic conditions that engender the problems of violence. Many learners come from situations where unemployment, poverty and abuse are the norm. Most gang-related violence in schools is caused by out-of-school, out-of-work youth and they should be given priority

attention. The habitual and frequent nature of violence in South African society and schools has induced a dangerous feeling of disempowerment amongst education actors. We suggest two aspects of education which can be ameliorated so as to positively impact the South African education system.

First, in previous issues of Quarterly Review (published by the University of the Witwatersrands, Educational Policy Unit) we stressed the importance of counselling, absent at present in most poor schools[14]. Budgetary constraints prevent education departments from employing specialised teachers to assist schools with a track record of violence, and occasional visits by social workers have failed to address the problem and to win the confidence of school communities. Therefore, one solution would be to relieve well-liked and trusted teachers of teaching hours to provide counselling services, conceived broadly to include participatory facilitation designed to allow children to consider and process their experiences and their worlds.

Second, South Africa enjoys significant language diversity. Specifically in the education context, language issues are closely linked to questions of power and the pursuit of human rights. Rather than using it for divisive and segregationist purposes--as is current common practice--South Africa's rich linguistic heritage could be used as a classroom resource, for cognitive development and as a way to enhance the human potential of learners and of all South Africans.

While significant strides have been made to humanise schooling, such as the prohibition of corporal punishment, educators in South Africa must continue their efforts to increase safety and justice in their schools--to break the cycle of violence.

Notes

Portions of this article are excerpts from the Educational Policy Unit's Quarterly Review, published in July 1999 and the South African Human Rights Commission Report on Racism in Public Secondary Schools, February 1999, both written by this author.

"R" denotes the local currency, the South African Rand.

In April 1992, Minister Clase unilaterally announced that all white schools would be converted to Model C status and become state-aided schools run by a management committee and a principal. A set number of teachers were paid by the state while the rest of the expenses were borne by the parents. The management committee had the power to appoint teachers, decide on admission policies, deal with curriculum developments and impose fees.

City Press 16 May 1999, Sunday Tribune 24 April 1999, The Star 23 April 1999, Sunday World 18 April 1999.

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