Teacher appointment in ethnic diverse schools

Prof Jan Heystek
Department of Education Policy Studies
Private bag x1
Matieland
7620
Faculty of Education
University of Stellenbosch
South Africa
Heystek@sun.ac.za
27 21 8082283 Fax

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ABSTRACT
South Africa is still in the process of moving from legislated apartheid to an all-inclusive system with equal opportunity for all citizens. The pre-1994 dispensation was based on group coherence and identity. The 1996 South African Constitution emphasizes individual rights rather than group rights. The diversity in South Africa, which includes ethnicity, socio-economic status, education level, gender and ability, creates unique situations for school leaders to lead their schools not only to what the government would see as an acceptable level of inclusion but also to what the local community of the school would find acceptable. In this research, teachers were asked which people they would prefer to work with and to see appointed at their schools. These preferences are explored against the backdrop of political change in South Africa as well as particular sociological perspectives on identity and diversity.

Key words
Leadership
Ethnicity
Diversity
Appointment
Language

Introduction
Typical of Africa, South Africa has many ethnic groups in the nation state that was created by imperial governments. In 1994 South Africa began the transformation process from being a system of legalized separation to an all-inclusive democratic society. The South African education system has a vital role to play in reconciling different groups to becoming members of a recently formed all-inclusive society founded on equity for all. The diversity of people,
which includes ethnicity, socio-economic status, education level, gender and ability, makes this role particularly challenging.

The article focuses on teachers’ lived experience and perceptions of diversity and identity, which are reflected in their description of whom they would like to see appointed and have as colleagues. This approach is founded on Fiedler’s theory of the least or most preferred co-worker (Fiedler). At some schools, especially the formerly whites-only schools, learner composition has become much more diverse. Since the expectation of the national department of education is that the teacher composition in each school should reflect that of the school learner composition, this diversity has direct implications for the appointment of teachers.

The South African population was formerly classified according to the racial criteria of politically and socially constructed identities. Consequently, racism has a strongly political flavor in South African society.

The arguments in the article draw on the social identity theory developed by researchers such as Billig and Tajfel, 1973 and Tajfel and Turner, 1986. This point will be developed later in the article. The issue of power is also central to the decisions and social interactions. Hence, power is conceptualized as the ability of an individual or group to have a degree of control over their own group and / or over other individuals or groups, to enhance their own goals (Poggi 2001, p. 8). According to Sachdev and Bouris (1985, p. 430), the power level of individuals or groups determines their execution and use of power. Individuals with the most power in groups or groups with the most power in intergroup activity, exercise the most power against other individuals or groups. The use of this form of power can lead to discrimination during the appointment process which may be problematic for teachers belonging to a minority ethnic group or even for teachers from the out-group in a more mono-ethnic school.
The aim of the research

The aim of the research was to explore teacher preferences with regard to who they prefer as colleagues. The context is the national political pressure to appoint teachers to represent the diversity of the country in every school, but within the complexity of individual and social identity of each individual. Tooms, Lugg, and Bogotch (2010) refers to this process as the person who bests fits the available position but the process of the appointment is contaminated with prejudice, labeling and acceptable expectations for specific posts and positions.

During the empirical study, language was used to define the main ethnic groups in the country. This was done purposefully to avoid the problem of using emotionally loaded concepts such as race, on the one hand, and simply adopting broad concepts such as culture and ethnicity, which are open to a number of interpretations, on the other hand, which could influence the reliability of the answers.

Background

The 1994 all-inclusive elections in South Africa introduced a new democratic system with a new constitution in 1996. The political change from a white (minority) dominated government to a black majority government understandably required new legislation for education. The racial classification of the South African population before 1994 categorized all the citizens of black African origin as ‘black’. Since 1996, the ‘black’ population is seen as falling mainly into nine language groups: the South African Constitution acknowledges these nine African languages along with Afrikaans and English as the official languages of the country. Like all other African countries, South Africa has a diverse population. The nine official languages
can be further grouped into Nguni (IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, IsisNdebele) and Sotho (SeSotho, Sepedi, SeTswana), XiTsonga, TsiVenda and SiSwati.

Since 1994 South Africa is a country where equal opportunities for every citizen and group are enshrined in the constitution. Those in the white minority who were in power have been politically disempowered. This is different from Europe and Northern America, where majority rule is the central principle of western democracies. It is important to read the discussion of the data in this light because it may have influenced the respondents’ perceptions and experience of diversity.

Some of the important new legislation that relates to the topic of this article is to be found the clauses in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution, which emphasizes that there is to be no discrimination against any individual on the basis of race, sex and religion or language orientation. The South African constitution emphasizes individual rights rather than group rights because group rights were so closely tied to the injustices of the past. It should also be noted that the emphasis on individual rights could also be the influence of the western world’s understanding and emphasis on individualism rather than the African emphasis on social group and communal rights (Lessem and Nussbaum 1996; Jackson 2004).

The insistence on equal opportunity and freedom of choice and association because of the need to redress the imbalances of the past has direct implications for the appointment of teachers in schools with a diverse ethnic composition. Since the political change racially constituted schools have officially ceased to exist. However, formerly blacks-only schools are still predominantly attended by black learners with only limited migration of white, Indian or colored learners to the black schools. In contrast, the enrolment of large numbers of black learners at formerly white, Indian and colored schools has changed the learner composition of these schools. As yet, however, these schools have not appointed many teachers from other racial groups to reflect the new learner composition of schools as expected by the National
Department of Education. This seems to be an international trend according to Lumby and Coleman (2007, p. 11).

Governing bodies, which are community-focused governing structures, determine the school’s policies and concomitantly the values and culture of the school. One of their functions is the recommendation of educators to be appointment by the provincial Department of Education (Department of Education 1996 section 20). This has implications for the diversity and identity and ethnicity of individual teachers in the appointment process as well as in the working environment.

**Ethnicity and social theory**

It is not the purpose of the article to provide a detailed clarification of the concepts of race and ethnicity. However, some exploration is necessary. Schermerhorn, Hunt and Osborn (2004, pp. 4, 52) use the concepts of race and ethnicity as synonyms, while Ashmore, Jussim and Wilder (2001, p. 43) define ethnic groups as groups with a shared ancestry. In the South African context, the socially constructed black race has been deconstructed and recognized as nine ‘ethnic’ groups, in the sense that political recognition has been given to nine languages along with English and Afrikaans. These nine languages are generally referred to as ‘African’ languages. The irony is that Afrikaans is also an ‘African’ language in the sense that it developed in South Africa. Ashmore, Jussim and Wilder (2001, p. 46) make the useful point that even the label of ethnic is a ‘political reification or construction of a particular authorized version of a culture’ because it is erecting boundaries where they did not exist before. The same diversity with regard to language, religion and shared ancestry exist in the colored and white communities. For this reason the term ethnic is preferred to the former racial groups. This preference is based on the assumption that ethnicity has more nuances than race and is also a more realistic and practical concept to explain the diversity in South Africa. This research is a purposeful attempt to move away from the concept of race and especially racism which still is link with emotion and feelings in the
South African context. Ethnicity also allows more groups to be identified within the black ‘race’ in South Africa. Ethnicity consequently allows for identity (individual and group identity). Utilizing and therefore acknowledging the concept of ethnic or ethnicity, is already a form of recognition and acceptance that identity and, therefore, also diversity exist. Social identity theory will be used as framework to discuss and analyse the findings from the research.

According to Brown and Adams (2003, p. 2413), self-categorization theory developed by Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell, (1987) and its forerunner, social identity theory (Abrams and Hogg 1990; Tajfel and Turner 1979), propose that when people categorize themselves as members of a group, they also may identify with that group, associating themselves with its salient attributes and norms. Membership of an organization provides an important social identity. For the purpose of this article, it is important to recognize that social identity theory proposes that people identify and therefore also categorize themselves as individuals or as group; they are not categorized by outside political or social power, as was the case with legislated social separation and categorization before 1994 in South Africa.

Jehn, Northcraft and Neale (1999, p. 745) indicate that according to social identity theory, group members establish positive social identity and confirm affiliation by showing favoritism to members of their own social category (e.g. Billig and Tajfel 1973), with possible effect that via discrimination and self-segregation may disrupts group interaction. This again has specific implications for teacher appointment in schools with minority black or white teachers and a diverse learner composition especially if the teacher integration through redress appointments is forced through legislation based on the principles of equity and equality for all.

Tajfel and Turner (1986 cited by Zârate and Garza 2002, p. 236) argue that social identity theory proposes that individuals desire a positive and distinct social identity, and that individuals accomplish this partly through comparisons between their in-group and a relevant out-group. Similarly, the
mutual inter-group differentiation model explicitly predicts that groups make conscious efforts to distinguish the in-group from an out-group, leading to prejudice. Individuals have dual needs of inclusion and distinctiveness. Threats to one’s sense of distinctiveness can also lead one to respond in a more stereotypical fashion towards relevant out-groups. The results of previous studies imply that perceptions of similarity between groups threaten the in-group distinctiveness and heighten prejudicial reactions. When self-awareness (or self identity – author’s interpretation) receives sufficient emphasis, this distinctiveness (or diversity – author’s interpretation) promotes harmony between groups, but when the self and individual identity is not emphasized, similarity between groups promotes positive intergroup relations (Zârate and Garza 2002, p. 247). These emphases make it important for the education system to create a balance between individual and group identity. School governing bodies must take account of this during the appointment process.

Group distinctiveness in combination with the self-affirmation procedure, produces the most positive attitudes towards the out-group. Attention to in-group distinctiveness is in fact self-affirming, but self-affirming as ‘unique’ and therefore good, rather than as 'good' as implied by the self-affirmation approach (Zârate and Garza 2002, p. 242).

Individuals often identify strongly with their ethnic group membership; failure to appropriately acknowledge that identity can lead to negative intergroup interactions. Ethnic identity is important to many individuals, and attempts to ignore or downplay the significance of that important self concept can have negative consequences. Ethnic identity provides a sense of the self as distinct, which serves to reduce prejudice (Zârate and Garza 2002, p. 242).

**Diversity and identity**

Schmerheron, Hunt and Osborn (2004, pp. 4, 50) note that diversity is a reality in the workplace. In their exploration of diversity, they use a broad conceptualization of diversity, which includes gender, ethnicity, age, able-
bodiedness, sexual orientation, parental status, religion and marital status. Lumby and Coleman (2007, p. 57) offer an even broader definition, seeing diversity as an intriguing and multi-faceted concept with many possible interpretations and meanings. Nevertheless, the concept is increasingly becoming synonymous with ethnicity. Within the context of this article, diversity refers to the experience with and exposure to people from different ethnic groups. 

Ashmore, Jussim and Wilder (2001, pp. 71, 76) make a distinct link between individual as well as group identity and diversity. They refer to social identity as territorial, racial, religious, linguistic, and gender identities. They use the term diversity to refer to people from different countries living in the US, thus diversity is much the same as ethnicity. This is also important in understanding the relation between the individual and larger sociocultural systems (Ashmore, Jussim and Wilder 2001, p. 4), in which individual as well as group identity and diversity become inseparable. Diversity implies identity because without well-defined identities there cannot be any diversity. An acknowledgement of identity, and especially group identity, acknowledges diversity. Consequently, school leaders and governing bodies, central role players in the appointment process of teachers, must be able to understand and acknowledge their own identity to be able to understand and accept diversity: issues of identity and diversity do not have to be in opposition with each other but they are inseparable. 

Jehn, Northcraft and Neale (1999, p. 743/4) identify three types of diversity which play an important role in the appointment of teachers in the South African context. The first is informational diversity, e.g. educational background where white teachers are in general better trained than other ethnic groups, especially black teachers, as a result of their privileged position during apartheid. The second is social diversity. This includes socio-economic status, race, gender, and ethnicity, easy to detect and to label. The third is value diversity. An illustration of this is difference is how people show respect to people in authority positions. It may be stereotyping but in the
African communities it is expected that the lower ranking person must look down, while people from a western perspective expect the subordinate to look them in the eye.

Labeling of oneself or one’s own group or an outsider or group involves power and to some extent control (Gunter 2004, p. 21). This kind of categorization becomes a powerful form of control when the ‘in-group’ (the own group to which one belongs) superimposes a category on an ‘out-group’ (groups you do not belong to) and thus creates an acceptable or unacceptable perception about the out-group. Power is increased when value and emotional significance is attached to the labeled group (Ashmore, Jussim and Wilder 2001, p. 20), e.g. he is one of the white conservatives who were associated with apartheid; hence he is less or not welcome in a group or team. Clearly the degree of power depends to a certain extent on the profile and stature of the individual or in-group doing the labeling (Gunter 2004, pp. 22, 35). Political in-groups can entrench their power by using their position of dominance to categorize or label the out-group. The intensity of antagonism between in-group and out-group also contributes to possible conflict (Ashmore, Jussim and Wilder 2001, p. 34). Labeling, especially when stereotyping is involved, may cause difficult situations for leaders in schools with staff members from minority groups, or members not from the dominant language group in a school (Schermernhorn, Hunt and Osborn 2004, pp. 4, 50). The in-group can make it difficult for members of the out-group to become actively included in the in-group, thus marginalizing them. This could affect their effectiveness as teachers.

It is possible to view labeling as an innocent activity with limited consequences While acknowledging the possible problems related to categorizing complex issues such as diversity or identity, Ashmore, Jussim and Wilder (2001, p. 20) argue that labeling can also be a form of categorization that is necessary for cognitive simplification and social structure. Nevertheless they stress that social identity, especially group identity with the concomitant implication of diversity, plays a role in conflict.
Although they do not discuss this country in their book, the armed conflict in South Africa prior to 1994 is an example of a clear link between conflict and social identity; action must be taken to ensure a recurrence of this. Leading schools with diverse learner populations becomes an important component in ensuring the harmonious existence of the South African society.

Although diversity is more than racial, ethnic or cultural differences as will be discussed later in the article, this article focuses on ethnic diversity.

**Research design**

The research was conducted in three phases. During the first phase, which used a quantitative approach, the primary data were gathered from a large sample of the population of teachers in South Africa. Although the final sample cannot be seen as fully representative because only eight of the nine provinces were included, the large number of questionnaires that were returned is sufficiently indicative of the perceptions of teachers in the country.

The purpose of the survey was to determine the perspectives and feelings of teachers about language in ethnic diverse schools. The first large-scale questionnaire data gathering was followed by a second phase, one-year later during which a second questionnaire was completed by a smaller sample. The second phase was conducted one year after the first phase with another a shorter questionnaire to clarify data obtained from the first questionnaire. The third phase was conducted six months later. This was three focus group interviews with principals to clarify some of the issues mentioned in the two questionnaires.

**Population and sample**

The population for the research is all teachers in South African schools. A convenient sample was used for the first phase. The respondents were teachers doing either a B Ed Honours or an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) in Education Management, Leadership and Policy programs. The students attended sessions at twelve venues in the country namely Durban, Pretoria (metropolitans), East London, Nelspruit, Polokwane (cities), Welkom
(smaller town) and Bushbuckridge, Kokstad, Lusikisiki, Mthatha, Makhado and Vryburg (small rural towns). All the students attending these sessions were asked to complete the questionnaire. That made a possible 3,000 respondents given the number that had registered. A total number of 2,795 questionnaires were completed. Since not all respondents answered all the questions, there are different total respondents for different questions. However, there are enough completed questionnaires to make the data reliable.

The questionnaires were administrated by the lecturers at each venue for each module. They handed the questionnaires out and collected the questionnaires at the end of one of the lecturing sessions. The normal procedure for the administration of questionnaires was followed. Students were informed that they were not obliged to participate in the research and there was no compulsion to complete the questionnaires before they left the rooms. The lecturers were instructed to hand the questionnaires to the students and leave the students to complete them. Students were to put the completed questionnaires in the classroom so the next lecturer could collect them.

It must be acknowledged that data collected in this way raises ethical questions. There is a power relation between lecturer and student in the formal classroom context and students may feel obliged to complete the questionnaire. There is also a possibility that the situation could have an influence on students’ attitudes and answers to the questionnaires. In order to address these issues, lecturers were not only instructed to make it clear to students that they were under no compulsion to complete the questionnaire, but they were also enjoined not to place any overt or moral pressure on the students to complete the questionnaire. In spite of the possible ethical implications of a 'captive' research audience it was decided to continue with the sampling and selection because it was a unique opportunity to gather data from such a large number of teachers from such a large and diverse part in the country.
Table 1 shows the results from the first questionnaire. This sample can be accepted as the perspective of teachers from the African section of the population only since there are so few members of the other three groups. The rest of the article, therefore, will use the perspective of black teachers.

Table 1: Racial classification of respondents (According to pre 1994 South African legislation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>2472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colored</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Dominant Home Language, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics SA</th>
<th>This research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. IsiNdebele</td>
<td>711821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tshivenda</td>
<td>1021757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. SiSwati</td>
<td>1194430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Xitsonga</td>
<td>1992207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sesotho</td>
<td>3555186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Setswana</td>
<td>3677016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sepedi</td>
<td>4208980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. IsiXhosa</td>
<td>7907153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. IsiZulu</td>
<td>10677305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. SiSwati 74
2. IsiNdebele 98
3. TsiVenda 107
4. Sesotho 152
5. Xitsonga 171
6. Setswana 286
7. IsiZulu 317
8. IsiXhosa 579
9. Sepedi 684


Figure 1: Language distribution in South Africa
Map showing dominant South African languages.

Table 2 provides some indication of the official language group numbers in the country (although it reflects the figures in 2001) and provides the figures for the language groups involved in this research. Although these numbers are not directly comparable, the table suggests that the respondents are similar in their distribution to the African language ratios for the South African population. This suggests that the responses may be accepted as having some reliability for these languages. Figure 1 indicates the number of respondents according to their language groups. The Sepedi speakers are the largest group because the university has a large number of students in the area in the country where Sepedi speaking people live.

**Table 3: My school is situated**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In or very near to an urban area e.g. Kempton Park</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In or near a township e.g. Mamelodi</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural e.g. not in a town or in a township</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An informal settlement</td>
<td>1766</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The locations of the schools (Table 3) where the teachers work are representative of where most teachers in South Africa work. The informal
settlement category, in this case, includes all small, rural communities. Although the respondents were not strictly selected according to random sampling guidelines and therefore cannot fully represent the teacher population, the venues where the questionnaires were completed as well as the number and areas where the teacher’s schools are located provides a fairly representative perspective of the diversity of the African teachers in the country.

The sample for the second phase of the research comprised teachers attending the education management and leadership programs in Durban, East London, Kokstad, Polokwane and Lebowakgomo (50 kilometers from Polokwane). The three focus group interviews was conducted with four principals each at Durban, big metropolitan city; Kokstad, small rural town where IsiXhosa, IsiZulu and Sesotho speakers live in close proximity; and Lebowakgomo, a small rural village, typical of large parts of the South African geographical and school context. The participants for the focus groups were invited during the class and the interviews were conducted in a room free of disturbance after the official class time.

Language composition in schools

The language composition of the learners and teachers in all the schools is similar. There is one dominant language and all the other languages are small minorities in the school. This pattern is visible when the language of the respondent and the dominant language in the school are compared. In areas where isiXhosa is the dominant language, the learner composition reflects this dominance. It is against this back ground that the data in the Table 4 must be interpreted. The majority of teachers (70%) work in a school where they belong to the majority language group (Fig 2). Since they have limited experience of multilingual schools or multiracial schools they may not realize some of the difficulties of teaching in a multilingual class or school. The official medium of instruction in black schools is English from grade 4 which
may be the learner’s second or rather third or fourth language after two or three African languages.

![Language distribution of respondents](image)

**Figure 2: Language distribution of respondents**

**Diversity, identity and co-worker preference**

Diversity implies that individuals or groups have evidently different identities. Diversity does not necessarily mean or indicate exclusion or superiority while identity does not exclude commonalities or sameness or differences between individuals or groups. According to Gunter (2006), the liberal approach to diversity used previously employed legislation to enforce legal compliance to protect groups and ensure equality and equity. Appointing in a diverse context or for a more diverse context in schools has its own specific complexities.

Table 4 provides some insight into how the teachers feel about the resultant diversity and the effect on their identity of having to work with people from predominantly different African language groups.
The following scale was used for this question:
1=strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=disagree; 4=strongly disagree

Table 4: Feelings about myself and other staff members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I prefer to teach in my mother tongue</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find it difficult to socialize with people from different</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language groups at my school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find it difficult to work with people from different</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language groups at my school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have problems to date or marry somebody from a different</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer teachers from my own language group to be appointed</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at my school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer the principal to be from my own language group</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues from different language groups are given</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preference in promotion or better posts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information in Table 4 must be interpreted against the background provided in Figure 1 and Figure 2. The teachers are generally used to working with people from their own language group and have limited exposure to language or ethnic groups other than the dominant language group in a school. At the same time, it is true that many African language speakers are able to understand and speak more than one African language because these languages are closely related. Social and marital relationships are therefore not uncommon.

Relationships in schools with mainly black ethnic groups become more complex when white South Africans are included in the social context of the school. In a second and preceding questionnaire the boundaries of ethnicity
were pushed a bit further to include specifically white and black ethnic issues. That is because of the South African history of separation of racial groups.

The following scale was used for this specific question:
1= It is important, 2= No problem with me; 3= I will prefer not; 4= I will be against it

Table 5: Preference in the appointment of teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers from my own language group</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers from other African language groups</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers with English as a first language</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers with Afrikaans as a first language</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers from my own cultural group</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>254</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>1224</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The only really significant data in this table are that many teachers (black) would prefer not to appoint white Afrikaans-speaking teachers in their schools. This is understandable given the political background of South Africa. However, when aspects such as the in-group and out-group as well as the individual and group identity are considered, one arrives at a social rather than a political explanation of why people prefer to work with people as close as possible to their own identity or their in-group. While accepting the validity of this sociological perspective, one cannot ignore the political perspective in any complex social context, especially the South African context. Here the loathsomeness to appoint white teachers may be more the result of political history than a sociological phenomenon.

To clarify the specific perspectives reflected in Table 5, three focus group interviews were conducted. For the purpose of this article, the specific questions in the focus groups were aimed at getting principals to explain their response ‘I will be against it’ to the appointment Afrikaans teachers. Is this
not a form of racism? That is if racism can be conceptualized as a practice of a black majority towards a white minority, and not as racism is generally construed as white towards black in the western countries. The participants in the focus groups reacted as follows. According to the principals interviewed, the remoteness of these schools in the rural areas means that black communities have very limited, if any, interaction with white people. Hence their sense of identity and in- and out-group is heightened, resulting in a strong preference for the in-group. Social and geographical reality, therefore, seems an important contributing factor which may prohibit transformation to greater inclusiveness within the diversity of ethnic and language groups.

These principals also stated that normally a school will not, without serious consideration, appoint a person from another language group in a school. That means, for example, that a school in the Lebowakgomo area, which has dominantly Sepedi-speaking communities, would not easily appoint a Setswana- or isiZulu-speaking person. The principals commented that this is more the case in the rural areas than in the cities. During the interview with principals in Durban they confirmed that they as Zulu-speaking communities would demand that a SeSotho-speaking learner at their schools be able to use and understand Zulu, especially in primary school, where Zulu is used as medium of instruction in the first three school years. In Kokstad, a principal narrated his experience of being a Sesotho speaker who was appointed in a dominantly isiXhosa-speaking community. He had to work very hard for four years before he was fully accepted as the principal of the school.

These narratives are congruent with Brown and Adams's (2003:2413) statement that organizational identity has important implications for organizational behavior, well-being, turnover intention, and economically important aspects of organizational commitment. When prescriptive norms hold sway, people may reinforce in-group standards and norms by upgrading group members who endorse those norms and downgrading members who undermine the norms.
Conclusions

In the South African context, an accent on social group identity may be experienced or perceived as a continuation of the policy of separation. The government’s policy of centralizing decisions about appointments can, therefore, be understood as a part of the policy of redress and equal opportunity in reaction to apartheid.

Identity preference or exclusion only becomes problematic when people are officially or purposefully excluded or prohibited from joining or associating with people from other ethnic groups or people from different identity groups. In the South African context it was problematic because separation was enforced by law and people were not allowed to associate with the groups or individuals of their choice.

In the current context of South Africa, the opposite of forced separation is applied in the appointment of teachers at schools. The provincial departments of education, who are the official employers of teachers, want to appoint black teachers in formerly white schools. Although it may be politically correct to do so as part of emphasizing equal opportunity in the workplace, it ignores a sociological approach to diversity and the identity preference indicated by the teachers in the research project. Jehn, Northcraft and Neale (1999, p. 743) argue that social category membership provides naturally occurring lines: ignoring these lines may lead to different forms of conflicts, while categorizing individuals into different groups can provoke hostility or animosity within the workgroup. This intra-group hostility can surface as relationship conflict over workgroup members’ personal preferences or disagreements about interpersonal interactions, typically about non-work issues such as gossip, social events, or religious preferences.

Intra- and inter-group hostility and conflict are normal when different ethnic groups work together. Members of the out-group find it difficult to be accepted or become part of the in-group as illustrated by the Sesotho speaking principal’s response during the interview in Durban.
Similar findings regarding identity and diversity preference were identified by Walker (2005, p. 139) in her study of black and white university students in the United States. In her interviews with them, students indicated that they do not find it ‘normal or natural’ to befriend people from different language or racial groups. Taking a different view, Gillborn (2006:15) argues that there is still institutionalized racism in spite of all policies implemented in the UK. These findings, however, must not be overemphasized because there are also many studies which indicate that people with different identities can and do work together to the benefit of the organization. In her study of teachers in schools with ethnically diverse staff compositions, Niemann (2006:104), for instance, found that teachers have learned and benefited from working with people from different ethnic groups.

Social identity theory explains that individuals and therefore also groups will identify with other individuals and groups in accordance with their preferences. This may provide an option during the appointment of teachers. Thus governing body members could appoint teachers according to the local community’s needs and criteria, as long as the governing body does not discriminate unfairly against any individual. Instead of social engineering through quotas and ratios to represent ethnic groups in the country, there could be a social process which accords with the wishes of the local community, as opposed to social engineering through legislation or political power action, there could be social power action.

More value diversity among employees, for example teachers in a school, decreased satisfaction, intent to remain, and commitment of group members. In contrast, a higher level of social category diversity increased satisfaction, intent to remain, and commitment (Jehn, Northcraft and Neale 1999, p. 753),

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