

## **Through the eye of the school – in pursuit of social integration**

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To appreciate the value of school integration one has to understand South Africa's history. The colonial and apartheid experiences have had a tremendous impact on the collective and individual psyches of South Africans – black and white, and all other identities. To varying degrees collective and individual behaviours reflect this deep-rooted experience.

It is this experience that prompted former President Nelson Mandela to observe in his inaugural speech in 1994 that, 'Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long, must be born a society of which all humanity will be proud.' He continued, 'Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world.'<sup>1</sup>

The legacies of racial domination and other related forms of discriminatory practices linger on in a democratic South Africa and they manifest themselves in many ways systemically as well as at the individual level. There is a critical need for all social institutions under the guidance of the democratic Constitution to engage in the project of giving birth to a new society imbued with the values and principles of an enlightened, modern and democratic constitution.

Schools, by virtue of their crucial role in society, can play an important role in this reconstructive project. What, therefore, does school integration mean? Given the historical circumstances described above, it must mean, among other things, that the divisions created by apartheid need to be addressed systematically as well as systemically. Integration is not merely about changing the racially exclusive demographics of learner and educator bodies – what we might refer to as desegregation – although it is this too. By integration we mean schools changing to meet the needs of all children enrolled, fostering

meaningful interaction among learners in the classroom, on the playground and in extramural activities, as well as instilling a human rights culture. In the context of South Africa school integration is also not confined solely to race, important as it is, but should seek to address other prejudices such as ethnic parochialism or chauvinism, gender inequality, xenophobia and other intolerances that are inimical to the spirit of the Constitution. It means seeking to construct curricula, texts and pedagogies that are informed by a democratic ethos. It requires teachers, school managers and communities that are equipped to promote a democratic school environment. In short, it is about *inclusivity* and *social cohesion*, in contrast to the division and fragmentation that characterised apartheid society and education.

School integration in South Africa has deep roots in the anti-apartheid or, better still, the pro-democracy project; it is born out of a conscious effort to transform undemocratic apartheid culture and practice by replacing it with a democratic, inclusive, education ethos founded on a human rights culture. The pledge to ‘Never, never and never again [allow]... this beautiful land ...[to] experience the oppression of one by another’, and the call for the birth of ‘a new society’ are authentically South African injunctions. Not only are concepts of non-racism, non-sexism and democracy entrenched in the Constitution, they are inextricably linked with such fundamental principles and values as access, equity and redress. There is, to be sure, much value in engaging with researchers from countries that are grappling with issues of school integration about their own experiences; an exchange that undoubtedly would enrich the South African experience. A concerted effort to promote research in school integration will thus give tangible effect to the national desire for a sustained democratic practice and human rights culture.

## The School Integration Colloquium

Drawing from what we knew and a desire to define a meaningful research agenda for the future, a colloquium was convened in October 2003. Invited to the colloquium were South African and international researchers and other interested individuals who undertook to engage in proactive and constructive ways in various research streams that would enhance our understanding of the powerful operant dynamics in the school as well as help inform effective policy formulation and practice.

The purpose of the colloquium was to review the latest international and local research and practice in the field of desegregation and integration of schools. We aimed to take stock of the status quo in school integration research and practice as well as to identify new directions research should be taking to support the process of school integration. The colloquium brought together a broad range of participants – from universities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), provincial and national government – all of whom contributed to identifying gaps and silences, issues currently neglected or in need of further investigation, in school integration research and practice.

At the start of the proceedings on 2 October 2003, Jonathan Jansen posed the question: ‘Why are we talking about school integration? Is it that this is just an American agenda?’ This took us back to the origins of this project and the reason it was initiated. The main purposes of the project, of which this colloquium was a part, were distinctly local, although there were transatlantic connections. The conference aims were to investigate:

- The unfolding role, character and dynamic of integration in South African schools – its connections to deeper historical, international and new contemporary social patterns, practices, images and representations on an international and local scale;
- The ways in which teachers, texts, managers and policy makers consciously and creatively make sense of and actively address the challenges posed by integration;
- ‘Best practices’ in terms of innovation and alternatives to dominant reproductive practices.

Furthermore, the conference aimed to:

- Establish a process which connects the research with practitioners and policy makers, and promotes dialogue;
- Make findings easily accessible and facilitate wide dissemination of the research products.

### *What was the rationale for this?*

The defining feature of South African schools and schooling is arguably the politics of race and racism. It is one of the central fault lines of South African society, intersecting in complex ways with class, gender and ethnicity. Race is

historically inscribed into the functioning of everyday life through those institutions in which the majority of children spend the greater part of their lives: schools. Seen as one of the principal generators, justifiers and vehicles of racialised thoughts, actions and identities, the challenge has been and continues to be whether and how the roles, rules, social character and functioning of schools can change to reverse the retrograde aspects of such formation and stimulate new and diverse identities and forms of acknowledgement and social practice.

South Africa is not alone in this challenge. Internationally, the massive global shifts of populations over the last century has seen the penetration of apparently relatively homogeneous national populations by peoples from beyond those national boundaries and borders. This process has modified older, internal, national social antipathies, or reinforced them. Although not new, particular forms of racism have accompanied diasporic movements of the last two centuries and diasporic populations have been both victims and perpetrators of racism. Colonialism and imperialism have given rise over time to constructions of inclusion and exclusion on the basis of race. Such constructions have often meshed with language, culture and religion. Slavery, and migrant and indentured labour, in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries together constructed internal populations who were and in many cases continued in the twentieth century to be dispossessed and socially marginal.

New social forces in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries propelled peoples across borders to augment social classes and races in newly constituted 'developed' worlds. Globally, the concepts of North and South, developed and underdeveloped or developing, and rich and poor, shade into a patchwork of colour constructs both on a domestic and an international scale. The issue of race and racism is as pertinent internationally as it is in South Africa. This is evident in the centrality of questions of race, racism, citizenship and diversity to school systems internationally. But there are key differences and local particularities within this common global historical experience. The historical pattern and politics of South Africa's racial formation has been part of, but has also shown marked differences from, those of other countries. In this regard, key differences between South African and American discourses are not only that the latter frames integration issues primarily within a desegregation and multicultural framework, whereas South Africans prefer to speak of inclusivity and integration; they are also linked to the dimension of

the issue within the overall context of schooling. Within South Africa, it is formerly white, Indian and coloured schools that have integrated. These are a minority of schools within the overall context. Despite this, the question of integration has played a powerful symbolic role in determining the nature of change within South African schools as a whole. In so far as the South African miracle has given hope elsewhere, what happens in South African schools around the question of integration can likewise either give hope or confirm lack of hope – or, as we hope, prompt more complex and sobering questions.

In the decades prior to the 1994 election, research and analysis of the role of race and racism in schools was rich, varied and contested. The role of race in promoting racial division was seen as central. Whether linked to class or to culture and language, race and racism were inextricably part of the social fabric and fundamentally shored up by the education system and its schools. Discrimination, racism and the various forms of inequality and exclusion to which it gave rise, was documented, debated and dismissed.

Social actors, writers and teachers enacted alternative visions and practices in a variety of forms. These were written about and celebrated. In the process of social struggle against apartheid, a broad vision of non-racial education emerged juxtaposed with more conservative and radical versions and visions on the one hand of multicultural and on the other of anti-racist education. These contrasted in several respects with the politics and approaches rejected and accepted both in the North and the South. But these differences and possible new commonalities were not yet apparent. It took the creation of a new state with a new politics of race to reveal these.

The 1994 election provided the opportunity for the wholesale dismantling of an edifice of schooling founded on race. If race separation was the defining feature of schools in the apartheid era, race integration became a defining aspiration in the post-apartheid era. The 1994 election also provided the opportunity for South Africa to experiment, explore and innovate in this area. The Constitution forbade all forms of discrimination and the South African Schools Act of 1996 provided the basis for the transformation of schools into paragons of non-racialism. Provisions were made for the integration of schools, the rewriting of curricula and textbooks, the renovation of institutions dedicated to the training and education of teachers and renewal of support structures in the management of education. In the meantime, the doors

of previously white, Indian and coloured schools had opened also to the wider world and new and different ways of seeing race and racism, segregation and integration were emerging that began to confront traditional and received ways of seeing these in South Africa.

Despite reconciliation at national level and integration at school level, however, racism persisted and was evident in both continuing manifestation of racial conflict and numerous forms of re-segregation inside schools. In the 1990s, several cases caught the attention of the national media. The Human Rights Commission was inundated with cases of school racism to such an extent that it commissioned a report that demonstrated the continuing, widespread character of race and racism in schools. This report, and other research, highlighted the deep continuities with the apartheid era.

South Africa's challenge to racism, when viewed through the prism of its schools, appeared to be a non-challenge. Integration was more a dream rather than a reality. National historical amnesia, particularly in schools, became the subject of a national commission of inquiry in 2000. The names of Vryburg and Grove Primary became synonymous with continuing, unresolved racial tension. Consultancies to resolve racial conflict flourished. Non-governmental organisations with a proud history of opposition to racism were squeezed but re-emerged more strongly in national fora with national policies and strategies. Debates around appropriate strategies and progressive forms of colour consciousness became prominent.

Even as a powerful new discourse of human rights provided the frame within which the national curriculum was revised early in the twenty-first century, this same curriculum received its most powerful challenge from separatist constituencies fearful of exposure of their children to intellectual and social diversity. They reasserted narrow conceptions of culture, identity, and ethnicity with a strong racial subtext. Significantly, all teacher organisations, across the spectrum, have distanced themselves from such expressions of ethnic cultural separatism. Alongside, but separately from the curriculum, the Forum Against Racism in Education produced a draft National Action Plan and Strategy to Combat Racism. Produced as late as 2000/2001, this Action Plan provides a platform for challenges both bold and humble, innovations both big and small, and experimentation both simple and profound, to be undertaken in schools.

The production of a new curriculum, which places citizenship and rights at its centre, as well as a National Action Plan to Combat Racism, raises a series of new questions about integration policies and practices in schools: on what kind of terrain in schools and teacher education institutions does the revised curriculum as well as the National Action Plan build; what are the national patterns in terms of integration; what is the meaning of integration for teachers, learners, managers and materials developers; how do schools and teachers challenge race and racism, if they do; are there teachers whose 'best practices' can be documented, texts that teach critically about race and teacher trainers who are charting the way; who are they and where are they; what can be learnt from other countries, even if by default; and can this information assist policy makers?

Surprisingly, the body of literature that does exist on the question is as disparate, impressionistic and fragmented as the initiatives that address it. Tight networks of researchers and practitioners exist, all drawing from different international traditions and approaching the issues in partial isolation from one another. Formerly racially segregated schools have integrated but what happens inside them and how this connects to broader social developments is documented and analysed by only a handful of researchers. Major themes have focused on the relationship between decentralisation and desegregation and conflict and contradiction in identity formation. They have also, rightly, concentrated on the continuing reproduction and manifestation of race and racism despite integration.

In this context, the main aim of this colloquium was to hear papers that reflected on the latest research in both local and international contexts as well as present visual representations and analysis of texts and products relating to race and racism in education in South Africa. The purpose was to inform a wider and strengthened research agenda in the field.

To what extent did this colloquium achieve this? The colloquium itself revealed many things. Conceptually, the question of integration was dealt with from many different frameworks: desegregation, inclusion and exclusion, human rights, and social justice formed the main organising concepts for understanding the patterns and dynamics of racial integration. The main trends were however demonstrated in the papers.

The large majority of schools in South Africa remain uni- or mono-racial. This emerged most clearly in the tracking of trends in one of the provinces where

integration was high on the agenda. Sujee's case study of the deracialisation of Gauteng schools examined the racial composition of learner enrolment, the educator body and school governing bodies in previously African, Indian, coloured and white schools in the period 1996–2001 and in so doing showed that there are small pockets of integration but who is integrated into what, how and with what effects still needs a great deal of work.

The discourse about race and racial integration is shot through with gendered languages and assumptions. In the words of Naledi Pandor, 'integration will only be fully achieved when girls are regarded in our schools as the equals of boys, when it is recognised by boys that girls have the right to realise their full potential, and when it is clear to everyone that sexual abuse of girls is a form of discrimination that prevents the achievement of their right to education.'

In the process of desegregating, it is possible to think of a continuum of models: separation-under-one-roof, assimilation and integration. There is evidence that many schools do indeed formally desegregate, but resegregate from within. Soudien, Carrim and Sayed argue that the dominant model of integration in South Africa is assimilation. They approach the concept of integration largely within the framework of the concept of inclusion. Their approach here is that integration must be approached by reference to difference, that differences are always interlocked and entangled, and that present within every inclusion are exclusions. Within this conceptual approach, their main conclusions were that constructions of race and schooling dictated the mode of assimilation into schools. The consequence has been the development of a two-tier system in which social class is a major factor in determining who is included and who is excluded. An interlocking framework, which makes sense of the connections between race, gender and class was highlighted here – but also the importance of seeing exclusions as being about much more than even this, and including exclusions on the basis of sexual orientation, disability, religion, age, and so on.

In tackling these issues at school level, teachers are critical. If teachers are to address these issues, then teacher education is a most important place to start. Moletsane, Hemson and Muthukrishna show both the possibilities and challenges in addressing the question from a social justice perspective. They argue for a human rights framework in teacher education that will prepare teachers to address a broad range of diversity factors including race, social class, gender, sexuality, religion, language, HIV status and disability.



Supporting teachers are national initiatives aimed at the wider public and including teachers and learners. Manjoo documents the actions of two national forums convened by the South African Human Rights Commission – a Discussion/Consultative Forum on Anti-racism in the Education and Training Sector (CFRE) and the National Forum on Democracy and Human Rights Education (NFDHRE) – as well as the strategies and initiatives that have been developed to combat racism.

Integration has been an issue in many different countries. International perspectives in this context were provided from the United States and India, two very different contexts. Orfield provides an overview of school desegregation processes in the USA from 1954 to the present. He examines research that shows how well-implemented desegregation policies have a variety of benefits for minority students, white students, communities and societies in general. He also draws attention to the powerful ways in which research can and has been used to influence desegregation policy and practice. Orfield's paper delivered the very important message that diversity is a good thing and that diverse classrooms improve the life-chances of learners.

Writing from India, Balagopalan's paper points to the intersections between the operation of caste in the Indian context and race in South Africa. She presents research examining the experience of previously marginalised *dalit* (lower-caste) children who have recently been included in public schooling. She addresses the deep exclusions of schooling and raises questions about the constructions of formal schooling, and how this determines the terms on which inclusion or integration occurs. She highlights the problematic dominance of upper-caste cultural assumptions in schooling as well as the consequent positioning of lower-caste learners as unable to achieve by some upper-caste teachers. Together the two papers suggest important new areas for research that will help to explain some of the complexities raised by the Soudien, Carrim and Sayed paper.

Language emerged as a critical issue in the colloquium in the inclusion and exclusion of children. Two papers, by Mda and Comrie, examine the practical implications of current language policy for the inclusion and exclusion of children in the society as well as in classrooms. They address local approaches to diversity and discrimination in schools in relation to theory, practice and research. Comrie discusses the barriers to learning presented by English as the

language of learning and teaching (LOLT) where this is not the learners' home language (which is most often the case for African learners in previously white, coloured and Indian schools) as well as by the pace at which the curriculum is presented. Mda points to the gap between the language rights enshrined in the Constitution as well as in education policy and practice. She stresses the need for all groups to commit to multilingualism as well as for all educators and learners to develop competence in at least one African language as a means of facilitating successful integration. These are, amongst other things, also constitutional matters, and so this section begins with a brief account by Bray of the constitutional (legal) framework within which school integration operates.

To end the colloquium, Prudence Carter from the United States and Stella Kaabwe from UNICEF both provided stringent analyses and commentaries on the proceedings. Carter's contribution is included here. We greatly regret being unable to publish Kaabwe's piece.

We came to the colloquium in a spirit of partnership. Institutional participants were the Human Sciences Research Council, the University of Pretoria, the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand and the Race and Values in Education Directorate within the National Department of Education, the South African Human Rights Commission and the Centre for Education Policy Development and Management. Colleagues from these institutions also served on the Colloquium Planning Committee. We thank them most sincerely for their contributions and look forward to continuing co-operation in future.

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### Notes

- 1 Nelson Mandela (1994), 'Statement of the President of the African National Congress Nelson Rolihlahla, at his Inauguration as President of the Democratic Republic of South Africa' (Union Building, Pretoria 10 May 1994) [www.polity.org.za/html/govdocs/speeches/1994/inaugpta.html](http://www.polity.org.za/html/govdocs/speeches/1994/inaugpta.html).