

Integration within the South African landscape: are we making progress in our schools?

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Policy debates on education in the apartheid era hardly ever broached the difficult subject of integration in our schools. Perhaps there was a tacit assumption that once legal apartheid ended, all would be resolved.

The ‘all’ centred on issues of significance such as entrenching funding equity, teacher development programmes, improving science and mathematics teaching and outcomes, matric pass rates, redress policy, language policy and education, and democratising school governance.

The focus on integration, if it occurred at all, was on access to higher education for blacks and women, and increased access to education for black children. Little attention was given to the issue of which schools blacks would choose to attend, and generally many of us anticipated that the key issue would be how to introduce quality to existing black education. Few if any of the education thinkers of the 1980s assumed that black schools would lose pupils to distant white suburbs, and few practitioners in assembly schools prepared themselves for the entry of black pupils who would become the lifeblood of many of those schools.

It is for these and other reasons that integration continues to be the least discussed and most ignored aspect of education today. All of us are embarrassed to acknowledge that there is an issue out there and it is calling for urgent attention.

Before venturing an attempt at answering the question on progress with integration, it is useful to reflect on some the voices that speak on these matters in South Africa today.

On 26 September 2003, the *Sunday Times* published articles by four men – apparently representative of our four racial groups – who had been asked to answer the question: ‘How far have South Africans progressed in transcending racial barriers to form a national identity?’

This question is similar to the one that this colloquium will address.

Pallo Jordan, an African National Congress Member of Parliament, was chosen to represent Africans. His article was headlined, ‘One state but not one nation’. He wrote:

As the recently released Census 2001 figures reveal, race still defines opportunity, wealth and poverty in South Africa. Despite what looks like impressive progress, black-owned corporations account for a mere 3% of the JSE. White males dominate the best-paid jobs and professions. *African females are the least educated*, the lowest paid and the poorest. The salience of race in politics is thus not likely to diminish.

Richard van der Ross, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape, was chosen to represent a coloured viewpoint. ‘Not white enough, not black enough’ is the headline assigned to his article. Van der Ross wrote:

The general cry is that before 1994, we were not white enough, now we are not black enough. We? Who are we? We, the coloured people. Yes, people still talk in these terms and probably always will. We cannot be wished away. Oppression by whites must not be replaced by oppression by Africans. What does this do to coloured identity? I perceive a certain closing of the ranks. It would be a pity if this was based on feelings against other population groups, be they white or black.

Herman Giliomee was chosen to represent whites. His article was headlined, ‘Whites have been left *emasculated*’. His conclusion, after an attack on Mbeki’s so-called Africanism, is that, ‘After years of Mbeki’s Africanism and his talk of two nations it is no longer possible to conceive of a white candidate winning an election for the ANC in a predominantly white constituency.’ As the author of a biography of the Afrikaner people, he can be forgiven for talking as if all whites are Afrikaners, *but he cannot be forgiven for talking as if all whites are men*.

And finally there is Adam Habib, invited to comment in his representative capacity as an Indian. His article was headlined: 'Race policies will haunt black elite'. He asks the following – and his conclusion is in his asking – 'Why is race and ethnicity more politicised and race relations more tense in 2003 than in 1994?' His answer is twofold: first, transformation is defined in racial terms; and second, Growth, Equity and Redistribution (GEAR) has deracialised only the elite, while leaving the majority of Africans poor and in the same position as they were ten years ago.

It is interesting to note the selection of voices, four adult males, known to be strong critics and only one of them put to the test of a popular election. Several issues relevant to the subject of this discussion arise. Do the chosen four men speak for the women of South Africa as well? The four are educated, middle-aged and urban-based. Do they speak for Tata Khumalo and Mevrou van Rooyen of rural Limpopo? If Giliomee had been asked to answer as an African, what would he have said? If Van der Ross had been asked to answer as an Indian, what would his comment have been? Taking the commentators out of their skins would have been an important first step in the process of building this nation.

To return to school, and our subject. Let us begin with the assertion that integration will begin when we take our learners out of their skins. The assertion is provocative and premature, because it is made without a considered reflection on integration.

- Are our schools making progress with integration? More importantly, what is meant by integration? Do we wish to establish whether learners of different races get on in school, sit together in classrooms, socialise and become fast friends?
- Does integration refer to curriculum matters? What are children seeing and learning? What is overtly and covertly transmitted in classrooms? Do black children emerge empowered, confident and competent?
- Does integration refer to teaching practice? Educators play a vital role in transmitting new values. Are our educators playing this new role?

The stark answer to these questions is that children in our schools are not integrating. The racial and gender composition of our schools has been changed in some ways. However, this fact cannot be termed integration.

Data on racial integration in schools is unusually scarce. The most recent data available for racial integration in schools is apparently for 1997. It is likely that the Human Sciences Research Council's 'Schools Integration' project will have more recent data.

In 1997, data for seven provinces (all but Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape) showed that about 22 000, or 5.4 per cent, of the 400 000 pupils in mainly white schools (defined as those with more than 70 per cent white pupils) were blacks, whilst in 'mixed' schools (where no race group constituted more than 70 per cent of pupils), 197 000 out of 488 000 (40.3 per cent) were black, and 104 000 (21.3 per cent) white. Indian schools had the greatest penetration by blacks: 15 000 or 15.2 per cent were black pupils. Nevertheless, most black pupils (95.8 per cent) were still in schools that were predominantly black. The total number of pupils is 11.5 million.¹

As the statistics indicate, it is the ex-Model C schools that are facing the challenge of integration, because black learners are looking for quality education. The same may be true of some schools in former coloured townships in Cape Town, as they have also absorbed an increasing number of black learners from the Eastern Cape.

Informal reports on what is happening in these schools point to serious racial tension – the incidents of racial violence in Vryburg and White River are cases in point. Our approach of first mix then engage reflects a somewhat naïve faith in our goodness of heart.

Guided by the belief that we live in a country in which each and every person is deserving of equal concern and respect and in which community grows steeped in the principle of ubuntu, schools have a central role to play in educating our children to hold one another in mutual respect. Despite this, very little is being done in all our schools. Black pupils are increasingly assimilated and little integration is pursued.

Some innovative strategies in this regard have begun to emerge from some of our schools. In Mitchell's Plain schools have adopted 'education against racism' programmes and in Cape private schools pupils have been encouraged to think about their curricula, and their participation in sport and cultural events.

Schools will only begin to succeed at integration if they adopt a holistic approach that includes the entire school. Curriculum, teaching methodology,

language and learning and many other areas will all have to be addressed if change is to take place.

The Department of Education's focus on values will have to be internalised in our schools. The challenge is not simply racial integration. The challenge is the successful promotion of the values of dignity, equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms. The challenge is to teach that skin colour is not a marker of superiority and inferiority and that we can all take pride in our cultures and heritages.

Moreover, 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 educational 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, and that sexual abuse is behaviour that will not be tolerated.

So, to return to the question: are we making progress with school integration? The answer is that there are some positive signs but, overall, the picture is not promising. The majority of our schools have been unable to take full advantage of the transformation set in motion over the past ten years.

Naledi Pandor spoke in her capacity as Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces.

Notes

- 1 Servaas van den Berg's calculations are from a 1997 Department of Education data set in his paper titled, 'The role of education in labour earnings, poverty and inequality' presented at the DPRU/FES Conference held in Johannesburg, 15–16 November 2001.

