

Diversity, unity and national development: findings from desegregated Gauteng schools

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This is a qualitative study that analyses the views and experiences of teachers and students at selected, desegregated schools in Gauteng, South Africa. It focuses on diversity with regard to race, class and gender. These social relationships are intertwined and often not made explicit in everyday life at school. People fight over them, but also work and live together as though they do not matter. There are instances when race, class and gender over-determine one another and where the one asserts its hegemony over the other. We argue that their appears to be the emergence of new patterns of consciousness and behaviour among students, at least in some schools, that could have far-reaching implications for educational change and the construction of national identity and development. We found that greater degrees of tolerance towards other races, classes and genders had developed over time. Studying these schools highlights the tension and fluidity between social cohesion and disintegration in contemporary South Africa. It draws attention to the fact that schools both reflect and shape the broader society and that desegregated schools can make important contributions to nation-building in the post-apartheid period.

Keywords: desegregated schools; diversity; educational change; nation-building

Introduction

The introductory editorial to this guest issue reviews many studies on school desegregation in South Africa which have examined opposition to such initiatives and the conflict over diversity within these schools. The seminal work had been the study by Vally and Dalamba (1999). Ten years later we asked whether this was still the case in the light of recent publications and our own research. In this article we examine perceptions of race, class and gender at desegregated, co-ed schools. A key finding is that while struggles over diversity persist, they occur alongside significant forms of co-operation that have developed over time. We explore how social boundaries are maintained, intertwined, negotiated and crossed.

There is a significant volume of educational writing that places developments in the post-apartheid period within the framework of the new Constitution and official education policies. This is not the only approach that can yield instructive insights. We focus on the implications of our findings pertaining to national development i.e. the building of a non-racial, non-sexist and equitable democracy. Diversity and unity or conflict and co-operation are inter-related in the complex forms we will explore. "Shifts" towards greater tolerance demonstrate the fluidity of social relations in schools. They also show the potential to transcend the names we use to categorise and divide people. In South Africa this issue has been at the heart of national development over several centuries.

Studying race, class and gender

In constructing a theoretical approach to race, class and gender, we do not wish to imply that other

forms of diversity (based upon, for example, religious beliefs or national origin) do not matter. In South Africa such dimensions have been neglected. Researchers have consequently failed to grasp the full extent to which they determine how identities are “formed” and “developed”, how people relate to one another, their perceptions and actions, and how they live. A black youth growing up and attending school in rural KwaZulu-Natal differs from his counterpart living in the Khayelitsha informal settlement, attending school in the neighbouring, coloured, working-class township of Mitchell’s Plain, and whose family migrates between “home” in the Transkei and the outskirts of downtown Cape Town. Labelling both youths black South Africans may be accurate only at a general level. However for purposes of adding analytic precision, nuance, and texture to our generic categorisations, it is necessary to recognise finer shadings of difference. More work needs to be done in the field of the articulation of diverse identities. Practical considerations forced us to define the parameters of our study more narrowly than we would have liked.

We did not have an *a priori* approach and then proceeded to search for data to boilerplate onto such a preconceived schema. We wished to use a conceptual framework that organically grew out of the empirical material and the data analyses. Theory, method and procedures were thus intertwined. Our intention was to best capture the contradictory aspects of life at the schools we had studied, *from the point of view of the research participants*.

We also asked what we could learn from the relevant literature. While Cousins (1999) is writing about social class in the United States, the points made are relevant beyond the socio-economic dimensions of diversity to which he specifically refers. He explains that the school is “*relational*” and “*cultural*”. Social class is objective in the sense that one’s life chances are tied to relationships with the economy, education, income and type of work. Drawing on Thompson (1966) and Katzenelson (1981), Cousins argues that class is an historical category and to understand it one must look at “describing *people in relationships* over time” Katzenelson (1981:204-205, emphasis added). There are empirical studies that support this perspective. Willis (1977) showed how working class students in England reproduce class; in South Africa, Dolby (2001) analysed how students “create” and “recreate” race through “taste practices,” influenced by global discourse and culture. Our focus is on experiences of diversity inside the school, as opposed to the socio-economic context of the neighbourhood or macro developments in education at national level (see Nieto, 1999:422-423).

Drawing on McCarthy’s notion of “non-synchrony” (1997) and Hall’s “articulation” (1996), Soudien, Carrim and Sayed (2004:30) propose an “interlocking framework” for diversity studies. This concept

recognises the highly complex ways in which race, class, gender and other categories intersect and interrelate to produce unique individual and group experiences. The fact that there is a dominant articulating principle of conflict or inequality does not ... undermine the prevalence of other levels of injustice. It simply suggests that the political approach pivots around a primary and articulating factor, which might be dominant for that moment.

We found this nuanced approach instructive and sought to apply it to our analyses. We added an historical dimension, so as to take into account (a) the realities of South Africa’s past and (b), in order to insert change dynamics into the interlocking framework. Gender dynamics predate colonial times, the subjugation of blacks by whites through land dispossession marked the first 250 years of our history, and the capitalist system is more than 100 years old in South Africa. Hall (1999:4) writes that “identities are about using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we come from’ so much, as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves”. The terms used to name, oppress and divide black people in South Africa over time illustrate the “historical variability associated with racial categories” and the changing social purposes such categories serve during different periods (McCarthy, 1997:543). Omi and Winant (1986:61) state that race is a “social historical concept” and that “the meaning of race and the definitions of specific racial groups have varied significantly over time and between different societies”. As we argue in the Conclusion, our findings have relevance for the roles that desegregated schools play in

the creation of a non-racial, non-sexist and equitable society within the context of national historical development.

Methods

Our study relied primarily on the analysis of interviews with principals, students and teachers at six desegregated schools during 2007. The interviews were complemented by classroom observations of teaching. They were transcribed and loaded into the Atlas.ti computer programme. The research team developed codes that were revised during the processes of coding. Output files, mainly on race, gender and social class, were developed from the code lists.

Thirty primary and high schools were selected from the 2,275 schools on the Gauteng Department of Education's (GDE) schools database. Schools had to participate in the study willingly. Additionally, schools were chosen that had attained a significant measure of racial integration, and in accordance with a poverty index, determined by whether there was a student nutrition scheme or not. The majority of public schools in South Africa are co-ed, as are all the schools we selected. Informed consent to conduct the study was obtained from the University of Pretoria, the Department of Education, and all the participants. In the case of students, permission was obtained from their parents.

Under apartheid, there were four racially-based Departments of Education in urban areas in Gauteng: the Transvaal Education Department (TED) for whites; the Department of Education and Training (DET) for Africans; the Education Department in the House of Delegates (HOD) for Indians; and the Education Department in the House of Representatives (HOR) for coloureds. Studying the GDE data base of schools, it became clear that there were few DET schools that had become desegregated during the past decade. Therefore, our sample does not include former DET schools.

A common assumption in public discussions is that the schools at which there has been significant desegregation over the past twenty years, have been well-resourced, middle-class and private schools in urban areas. While our sample does not include such schools, there were minorities of middle-class students who attended the schools we researched. The socio-economic status of the communities ranged from working class suburbs and townships, to squatter camps and informal settlements. Some of the surrounding neighbourhoods, like the schools, used to be white and middle-class, but are now home to large numbers of black people who struggled to pay school fees and who depended on the school soup kitchen to feed their children. Of the six schools, three were former TED schools, one was an HOD school and two were HOR schools. Three were high schools and three were primary or elementary schools. There had been an exodus of white learners from the former white schools, which now mainly cater for African and coloured students. At one of the former TED schools, the staff had remained "99% white", while at the other two they were mainly black. At the HOR high school, the student population was 30% African and 60% coloured. There was only one white student and the rest (approximately 10%) were Indian. At the former HOR primary school, 75% to 80% of the students were African and the rest were coloured. At both former HOR schools, 50% of the teachers were African and 50% coloured. At the former Indian school, 50% of the students were Indian and 50% were African. At this school, 60% of the teachers were Indian and 40% were African.

Findings

The discussion is structured around the analytic categories (i.e. the sub-headings below), generated by the research design and data analyses. The key question is: As these schools desegregated, how have social relations changed — or have they remained the same?

Naming

When asked if she got "along" with blacks at the school, a coloured student replied that she did.

Was there racial conflict amongst students? “I wouldn’t say [so]. The only thing is [that] they would talk about you, but ... in their own language, [so] you wouldn’t understand what they are saying.” Gossiping about the Other — “they” — in the Other’s language, whether real or perceived, was a problem for this student. For many African students English was the language of the school — “when we are doing education, we do English” — but “when we are together we do speak our home language”. Language is a terrain of covert sparring amongst races — coloureds and Africans in this instance. At times, conflict occurred in the open. The purpose of calling one another names was to inflict hurt and humiliation upon other groups and to highlight their alleged and perceived differences, peculiarities and shortcomings. Those doing the naming also made their prejudices explicitly clear and these sometimes took on crude, derogatory forms. We were told that “... sometimes the coloured boys and the black boys will call each other names”. Macho hostility and antagonism overlapped with race. “... there’s this naughty boy, he is coloured and he teases the African child” — i.e. asserting his power over the other race. “He might say, you’re black, you don’t style, your hair is *kroes*, not straight.” He points out physical differences, interpreting them to be deviant from a “superior” norm.

The African student in the extract below, assigns characteristics to different racial groups and was at pains to state, similar to other cases of racial naming amongst boys, that hair texture and dress applied to the coloured girls in particular and that it was a marker of coloured femininity and competition:

“Some coloured girls are extremely jealous over each other, they don’t like how your hair looks like, or you don’t look nice in your school uniform. Black people are totally different; they always give funny remarks and they say we try to keep ourselves pretty, but actually we aren’t pretty. They’ll say you are ‘highy-tighty’ [i.e. hoity-toity], you haven’t got a nice body. Some speak in their language, and then we can’t understand what they say.”

One’s gender, how one looked, the shape of one’s body, one’s race, as well as inter-racial “jealousies” were intertwined.

A teacher made the point that naming had changed at his school over time and that the situation had improved (see similar findings in Weber, 2006). The observation below is significant, because it points to the adaptability and fluidity of racial and class categories.

“Teacher (T): And looking at the children in the classroom here, they get along like a house on fire ... but in the beginning there was that name-calling.

Researcher (R): Mmm.

T: You know, the names that we are not supposed to use.

R: That’s right, *ja*!

T: You know, the white child will ...

Researcher suggesting: That Kaffir or Hotnot [derogatory names for Africans and coloureds, respectively].

T: *Ja*. That name, all those names.

R: Mm, all those ugly names.

T: All those names use[d] to happen, that was in the [nineteen] nineties.”

A white teacher described how he had addressed an incident in which a black child had been the victim of racist name-calling during the early 1990s, soon after their school had become desegregated. This teacher perpetuated rather than challenged naming.

“We had ... a lovely intelligent black girl here, nice kid ... she was crying and she said to me that [a] particular boy [had] called her a *khefa* [kaffir] ... OK, so I said to her, ‘Can I work with you on this?’ ... and I said to her, ‘It’s hot air, and it just happened to trigger something in you’. I said, ‘Do you want to work with me?’ ... I sat opposite her and I said, ‘Look me in the eyes, I’m going to call you names ...’. You know, it took her a little bit of time, and she sat opposite me ... and I said, ‘Kaffir’ and she started to cry; and I said, ‘Why cry?’. And I said, ‘I’m going to say it again’, and I kept on saying this for about fifteen minutes, until she just calmly looked at me and the word had no more meaning. So what I did is to give her power.”

“That word [kaffir] is taking away her power ... And I said ... ‘You’ve got your power. Now, if this person comes again and calls you [names], all you have to do is look at the person and you don’t have to give away your power. You see, I’m very much into young people especially realising that power. And that word is ... it’s a degrading word ... but it doesn’t have to [be] ... you don’t have to collapse.’ Anyway, and then a couple of days later, she came and she said, ‘Thank you, because that boy tried it again’.”

This teacher’s idea of “empowerment”, in order to cope with naming, is open to criticism. It is associated with acceptance and increasing one’s tolerance towards derogatory, abusive language. What is proposed is passivity towards racism and sexism individually, institutionally and socially. The implicit lesson is to learn how to get used to racist-gendered naming, while those individuals doing the naming and, more importantly, the social and historical pathologies that lie behind the naming, are perpetuated. The excerpt shows the racial and gendered dimensions of power. It is interesting that race is foregrounded and appears to be more important than the gendered assertion of power of one sex over the other in the act of naming.

Teaching and spatial separation

The classroom observations showed that the majority of teachers did not address race or socially relevant issues when they taught. The study by Nkomo and Vandeyar (2008) came to a different conclusion. The teachers we worked with spoke about these topics in a vague manner, but there were a few exceptions, where the teachers elaborated on the social and political relevance of what they taught.

Some teachers drew attention to the fact that students tended to segregate themselves along racial and gender lines in classrooms and in the playground. Two teachers stated that they consciously formed inter-racial groups during lessons and pointed out changes over time.

“Most of them mix, others would have their own group ... like the time when I just started teaching I would find that ... say about 5, 6 years [ago] ... we’d do group work [and] then the coloureds would run to the coloureds, the Africans would run to the Africans. Then OBE [Outcomes-based Education] came in ... we then had to mix them according to ... how they learn, how everything they have to learn to integrate ... and there is where it started, so it’s even better now. Because, when we say form a group, you find that ... Africans and coloureds they are best friends together, some of them. OK, some of them would have a little mixture in the school.”

The physical separation in the playground or in the classroom was, in at least one or two cases, reinforced by physical separation in the communities created by apartheid. One white student said that he hardly saw his black classmates outside of school because they lived too far away.

R: So, in class you interact with each other. What about after class?

Student (S): During lunch, it’s just us friends. Once you are out of the class, everybody goes their own way.

R: So, out of the class you don’t really hang out together?

S: No, we don’t.

R: Have you visited any white or coloured kids [at] home?

S: No.

R: And they to yours?

S: No, never. They have also never invited me.

R: So, if they do invite you, you would go?

S: Yes, I would.” (Also see Phatlane, 2008.)

Even though there is evidence of students getting along across gender lines, there also seem to be gender preferences amongst learners, i.e. girls preferring to speak with girls and boys preferring to associate with boys.

“S: I talk a lot to the boys. Like have conversations and stuff like that and the girls ... also, they

talk a lot but they are mostly on one side. Yeah, they have their own conversations and stuff like that.

R: Do you mean the girls sitting on one side, as well as the boys [sitting together]?

S: Yeah.

A student highlighted the importance of male camaraderie and sticking together:

S: Because it's only around three to four guys in a class, so we have to get along anyway, so eh, that's basically it.

R: And then with the boys, [do] you get along with them?

S: Yes, boys we will sit next to each other, you know, just to keep our manlihood [sic] together."

Friendships, conflict and violence

Despite the fact that they were comfortable conducting activities perceived to be reserved for certain genders, some learners made the point that this did not mean that they did not interact with the opposite sex. Certain students formed more friendships with the opposite sex than with their own sex. In one case a learner said he was sensitive and liked sharing issues that troubled him with others. He found more support from female friends who understood human emotions better than male friends.

"S: If you talk to a boy, it's always about something [personal]; like they think that you're weak and they'll start saying other stuff ... or they laugh at you sometimes ... So if I talk to a girl, and they understand, they really understand what you are going through and they really comfort you when you are like in bad times. My friends also do it, but for them it's like they also keep [a straight face] because they do not want to show their weakness.

R: So, do you do that also — you do not really show your weaknesses, like maybe you are sad, and you do not really want your friends to see that you are not okay?

S: I am very emotional.

R: So, sometimes you do cry?

S: Yes. I do not think that it's wrong to cry. I mean, I'd rather let it out than to keep it in and then later on just burst."

There was much evidence of girls and boys forming friendships, including cross-gender friendships, especially outside of school. Cross-gender friendships were more evident at high school than at primary school. The activities that the learners said they pursued outside of school included going to movies, visiting each other at home, taking walks, attending birthday parties and forming study groups.

But there was also conflict. A high school girl revealed that she found the "back-stabbing" amongst girls unbearable and that this was why she preferred, in contrast to the statement made by the boy above, friendships with boys to friendships with girls. Race was not a factor here, according to her.

"S: It does not matter, but most of the time I get along better with the guys.

R: Why?

S: It's just that the guys are more considerate than the girls, they think before they act, so I can associate myself better with them.

R: So, in a way you are treated better by the boys than by the girls?

S: Yes. Because girls, they back-stab a lot. You don't have that with the guys.

R: And when we talk about boys or girls, does it matter which race?

S: It does not matter."

Respondents spoke about the victimisation of girls and gender-related hostility and conflict that sometimes intersected with race. A primary school girl spoke about being bullied and her fear of reporting the bully. "I'm scared. I'm scared that if I report him he might bully me more or something. So I try my best to stay far away from him [and his friends]."

Sometimes the conflict was more serious. Unlike the evidence presented in the study by Vally and Dalamba (1999), inter-racial violence rarely occurred at the schools we researched, as this statement by a learner demonstrates: “We’ve never had really serious problems in our school where we say we have bullying of coloureds bullying blacks or whites bullying blacks and coloureds. We never had such a thing.”

A few interviewees related various incidents: “There was one case where a ... black boy punched a white girl, but she was quite tough and she punched him back”. In another, more serious incident, a coloured boy threatened to kill a white teacher and she reported it to the police. The teacher stressed that the conflict was not about race:

T: Yesterday, we had this incident, a kid pointed ... [a] gun [at an]other [student]; he also had a knife.

R: Is it a race issue or just [a] poverty issue?

T: I don’t think that it is a race issue.

R: But this kid is black?

T: Yes, and the other one is white. But I don’t think that it is a race issue. A couple of days ago, they robbed some coloured girls on the sports ground. Coloured boys robbed coloured girls. They pushed them around and got their cellphones. I don’t think it is about race, but more about poverty, gangsters.

R: But sometimes poverty can also be linked to race. Let me ask [the question] from another angle. Are there poor white kids doing those kind of things?

T: Fewer than the poor coloured or black kids.”

Poverty and crime, reflecting social and class conditions in the neighbourhoods, could be linked to race and gender in ways where it is difficult to determine where the one begins and the other ends. Similarly, it is sometimes difficult to determine from the available data whether the conflict is about particular circumstances related to specific incidents, or whether it is about whites and blacks fighting with one another. However, it is hard to imagine that, once engaged in physical violence, the protagonists would be unaware of the race or gender of their opponents, or of feelings of racial hatred towards one another, as this example illustrates: “It’s like maybe a white girl fights with a coloured girl. And you find next week a black girl fight[s] with a black girl and a white girl fight[s] with a white girl. Like that!” We did not obtain evidence from students who were actually involved in violence and, as mentioned above, respondents stated that these incidents of violence seldom occurred at their schools.

In summary, friendships have developed over time across diversity lines, alongside real tensions and the exceptional case of learners fighting openly.

Possessions

The desegregated school, like other schools, united students: “We are all just kids”. Sport was described by one teacher as the great social equaliser: “... boys and girls of all races belong to one team, and there is no question of class, we are all the same. There are no social class problems in sport, maybe in the classroom. In sport we are all mixed ...” However, class and race were evident when students played soccer at one school. The game was described as the “favourite sport of blacks and coloureds”. When it came to playing against predominantly white schools, the black students did not have the same quality soccer boots and a teacher observed: “You can tell that these children come from a very low class”.

At several schools circumstances were somewhat different from the idealised “one big family” that one learner mentioned.

“R: But, you also have some learners who cannot pay the school fees?

S: Yes.

R: Does that influence ... your [social] interactions?

S: Yes, we do group ourselves. I do have poor friends, but most of my friends are from [a]

similar [socio-economic] background. It's up to them, whether they want to hang [out] with us. If they want [to], we don't have a problem. But sometimes they don't want to ..."

Food was a marker of class division and unity. A state-sponsored nutrition scheme provided meals to all pupils at poor schools. There were instances where learners brought their own meals to school. In most cases those who were friends shared their meals. Schools also organised tuck shops where students who could afford to bought ready-made meals. These meals were affordable to all students. A student explained that the financial circumstances of students did not necessarily mean that some students discriminated against others: "Children treat each other with respect. Friendship is not based on whether you have money or not ..." But, in other schools, class differentiation was more pronounced and learners behaved differently. There were instances where pupils chose their friends based on their appearances and the clothes they wore, as well as the amount of money they had to spend. There were also an attitude of looking down upon others, "irrespective of being of the same race", and boasting about material possessions. One teacher said: "Because at home they are rich, they can't talk to poor learners". In the words of another teacher:

"[You hear things like:] 'What do you mean, I have Internet at home, I have a computer at home. What do you know?' You see things like that ... they use their language to scorn each other. I don't know whether we can fix that one, but sometimes they use it in a playful manner, or to an extent whereby they become angry towards themselves [and towards others who are poorer] ... Sometimes their language is, I mean their mother tongue can be used in a co-operative way ... or to also, um, you know, insult ..."

Stealing expensive belongings of richer students or anything of value was reported to be quite common. At one school this took on racial dimensions when, at one stage, it was common to blame the "underprivileged" and blacks for students' belongings that had been stolen.

As much as the black parents may want their children to stay in desegregated schools, their involvement in their children's education and life at school was reported to be minimal. A deputy principal stated how schools benefitted financially from the migration of black students whose parents could afford to pay the fees to formerly whites-only schools. In his opinion there was a move to make it difficult for poor parents to send their children to these schools. He went on to explain that a bone of contention on the part of wealthier parents was the fact that their financial contribution to the school was greater than those of other parents. This also overlapped with race. There were "Indian parents" who complained that they paid more money for fundraising events. "But what they don't understand is that there are so many kids we have to carry. And the community we are serving also needs help".

Many of the students at the schools we studied came from poor families and lived in communities that struggled to make ends meet; where students could not afford to buy school uniforms. These were not necessarily restricted to black communities: "Remember, even if this was a ... predominantly white community ... they are from the lower [income] group". At one school, which under apartheid was reserved for coloureds, a teacher told us that it was not uncommon for parents living in the surrounding flats to be illiterate and that the crime in the community filtered into the school.

As more black pupils sought admission to former white schools, white parents moved their children away from these schools. A similar pattern was reported in former Indian schools. Teachers, however, tended to stay. The result is that the race, class and cultural backgrounds of teachers at desegregated schools were increasingly different to those of their pupils. Teachers play a crucial role in defining and maintaining school culture and tradition.

In schools where the racial composition has changed, but the teaching staff has not, teachers strive to preserve the traditional ethos of the school. Class relations are determined, in part, by the ownership of the school. At the same time, schools have also promoted multiculturalism and school unity.

Conclusion

Discussions of the data indicate that there is tension, as well as instances of accommodation and co-operation between different races, genders and classes. Overall, conflict has moderated over time. Earlier studies tended to imply that existing social boundaries would remain, while our work is in line with recent publications (e.g. Nkomo & Vandeyar, 2008; Vandeyar & Jansen, 2008). Violent acts continued to occur at the schools we researched, but they were the exception. White and black students played together and socialised after school. In the words of a white boy, not “fazed” by race: “We all got the same DNA types ... we all got fingerprints, we ... all got blood and all our blood is the same colour ...” But students also formed separate racial groups inside classrooms and on the playground during their lunch breaks. The physical separation of, and the actual distance between, the homes in which whites and blacks lived, reinforced social and racial separation at school. The indigenous languages spoken by Africans were disliked by some racial Others. There were significant racial/ethnic tensions amongst blacks, between coloureds, Africans and Indians. Girls, we were told by one respondent, were notorious for “back-stabbing”, while another respondent appeared to disagree. Yet, on a significant number of occasions girls stuck together and preferred the fellowship of one another’s company. Race and class then receded into insignificance. In as much as we can think about diversity in terms of articulation and an interlocking framework, we can also think of it in terms of the hegemony or dichotomisation at different times and of particular dimensions. Most of the stories we reviewed above can be interpreted in this way.

In considering the significance of the empirical findings, we wish to contextualise the study of diversity and unity at the institutional, school level, in relation to national development. By this we mean that schools are the social barometers of the nation. They help to mould society and history and, in turn, are influenced by macro, systemic changes and structures. Analysing the successes and failures of schools enhances our understanding of educational change and provides indicators of the state and future of post-apartheid South Africa. We are mindful of the fact that the majority of schools in the country remain racially segregated, and that our research was restricted to six schools in one province. Moreover, as stated earlier, we focused on selected dimensions of diversity. We hope that this work could inform further anthropological and cultural studies. The tension between social cohesion and disintegration is primarily a qualitative problem, justifying the use of case studies. Alexander (2001:129) refers to contemporary world-wide trends and their relevance to South Africa: “[A]s in recent historical experience in Europe, Africa and Asia, [nations] fall apart into warring ethnic groups ... If that were to happen, similar events to the north of us would pale into historical insignificance.” We think, for example, of the anti-colonial struggle for national liberation and nation-building in southern Africa, the xenophobic violence in South Africa’s urban townships during May 2008, as well as the on-going conflict in both Sudan and the Congo.

In the aftermath of the deep divisions brought about by apartheid, this study and other studies have shown that desegregated schools can contribute to the wider project of nation-building, even though there are no guarantees of a happy outcome, and even though the potential for reversing the gains made over time could be reversed.

The conclusion reached by case studies of desegregated schools in the United States reported below is of value to diversity studies in South Africa. It realistically emphasises the social value of desegregated schools while recognising their limitations. At the same time, the study draws attention to the complex relationships between schools and the wider society.

Our central finding is that school desegregation fundamentally changed the people who lived through it, yet had a more limited impact on the larger society.

... desegregation made the vast majority of the students who attended these schools less racially prejudiced and more comfortable around people of different backgrounds. After high school, however, their lives have been far more segregated as they entered a more racially divided society (Wells *et al.*, 2005:5).

Acknowledgements

We thank the National Research Foundation for providing the grant that made this research possible and the research assistants who participated in the research process: Hlengiwe Sehlapelo, Roseann Ifeoma Eze, Zama Kunene, and Yu Ke.

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