

EXPERIENCES OF DIVERSITY IN A SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SCHOOL

by

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, RAKGADI SOPHY PHATLANE, declare that this thesis, **Experiences of Diversity in a South African Public School**, is my own work and that all sources used or quoted have been acknowledged and have been indicated by references.

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Date

SUMMARY

For many observers - both inside and outside the country - South Africa's bloodless transition from the minority white domination of the apartheid era to democracy represented a political miracle of no mean significance. An important difference between the period before 1994 and the subsequent period is that the old divisions into which society was compartmentalised - Whites, Blacks, Indians and Coloureds - have disappeared. In their place there is a more integrated society, albeit with multiple diversities. Theoretically, therefore, the contours and racially-based dividing lines which were artificially created by apartheid have ceased to exist. Practically, however, such divisions still persist - both at societal and at school levels. The reason for this is that the deep-seated distrust of the 'other' could not be wiped out overnight - nor could integration take place without deliberate state intervention.

Thus, using an ethnographic case study research design, this thesis - *Experiences of diversity in a South African Public School* - contributes to the contemporary debate on desegregation, racial integration and cultural diversification of the learning environment. It traces the progress of a former Whites-only Afrikaans medium high school to determine the success or failure of the education department's declared goal of ensuring racial integration at school level. The study concludes that contrary to the findings of other recent research projects on desegregation in South Africa, school integration and the social cohesion of learners are possible if a proper enabling environment is created.

Undertaken at a specific school, the study does not claim that the findings are a trend in other schools as well, although that cannot be totally ruled out in schools similar to the one studied. Most learners at this school have, reasonably, crossed the racial divide and have realised that they cannot exist independently from one another anymore - even when this seems to contradict the expectations of their parents.

Key words: desegregation, diversity, education, experiences, integration, race, learners, racism, re-segregation, segregation

GLOSSARY OF WORDS

Antiracist education - Education that addresses critical thinking skills and openly discusses tensions and contradictions in society and validates the needs, concerns and experiences of students, whatever their background.

Assimilation - The process whereby a minority group gradually adopts the customs and attitudes of the dominant/prevaling culture.

Desegregation - The process of formally ending racial segregation.

Diversity - The fact/quality of being diverse; difference, a point or respect in which things differ. Depending on who you are, the **meaning** of ‘**diversity**’ may differ.

Ethnography - The branch of anthropology that deals with the scientific description of specific human cultures; a form of research focusing on the sociology of **meaning** through close field observation of sociocultural phenomena.

Experiences - A ‘how-to-self-help’ knowledge base to answer questions on control, management and understanding the ‘self’; helping one deal, learn, know and master the self; emotions through the senses or mind.

Integration - The bringing of people of different racial or ethnic groups into unrestricted and equal association in society or in an organization.

Multiculturalism - An ideology advocating that society should consist of, or at least allow and include, distinct cultural groups with equal status. Multiculturalism is a term often used to describe the cultural and ethnic diversity of a nation and argues that diversity is a positive force for a society’s nationhood.

Public School - A primary (Grade R - Grade 7) or secondary (Grade 8 – Grade 12) school in South Africa which is supported by public funds and provides education to the children of a community.

Race - A local geographic or global human population distinguished as a more or less distinct group by genetically transmitted physical features.

Racism - The belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability and that one particular race is superior to others.

Re-segregation - When intrusive, race-based, federally-imposed controls are removed (most frequently through lawsuits), then school admissions, employer hiring, and housing patterns are once again freely determined by democratic citizen choice.

Segregation – The legal separation of different races in daily life.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved sister, Margaret Makashila Matabane, and my mother-in-law, Talitha Nkhabane Phatlane - both of whom did not live to see a doctor in their family.

Mma waka montedi, Salenyana'a Mmarena, ke re Pheladi! Le šomile la nthekela seleiti, lena, le papa, Tatiane, Tšakala Maesela Mohumanti wa bo Ngwato- Serogole. Go lena ke re Montshepetša bošego! Le go Masanika, kera ou sesi, ke re Ngwato Mosadi, Mpedi'a Mmamakatane'a ditlou! O se fetše ka nna mokgaga o mošweu le bošego!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	-	African National Congress
AWB		Afrikaner Weerstand Beweging¹
DoE		Department of Education
MDM	-	Mass Democratic Movement
NEPI	-	National Education Policy Investigation
NP	-	National Party
OS	-	Observation Schedule
SA	-	South Africa
SASA	-	<i>South African Schools Act</i>
SGB	-	School Governing Body
SJ1	-	The first School Journal
SJ2	-	The second School Journal
SMT	-	School Management Team
UKZN	-	University of KwaZulu-Natal
USA	-	The Unites States of America

¹ Afrikaner Resistance Movement

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