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1
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How far have we come?

It's one thing to open the doors of learning, quite another to change what's behind them, argues **Jonathan D Jansen**

The single most important observation that can be made about race and education after 10 years of democracy is that schools and universities have been much more successful at meeting the demand for racial desegregation than achieving the ideal of social integration.

It is very important not to confuse these two constructs. Racial desegregation was, in many schools, a relatively easy accomplishment. In the case of universities, both legislative demand and new funding incentives have made racial desegregation a survival imperative, if not a social justice response.

What policy has not conceived or practice revealed are the kind of methodologies that could create within institutions the kind of social interactions that would build a broader sense of citizenship, compassion and community — "learning to live together", as Andy Hargeaves puts it.

It has been, as repeatedly stated, easier to open the Freedom Charter's doors of learning. What happens behind those doors is infinitely more complex. The Achilles heel of white schools has not been about a lack of accommodation for black students in formerly white classrooms, but rather about not having black teachers in the same space. That is why most (although certainly not all) of the so-called liberal, white, English-speaking schools have made so little progress on this subject. It has to do with deeply ingrained, racialised notions of white competence and black incompetence.

I simply do not buy the argument that in a country with almost 400 000 teachers, it is impossible to find significant numbers of highly competent black teachers. In this context, incoming black teachers are already framed in ways that disempower them — and the same nurturing and accommodation so readily made for novice white teachers seldom applies to novice black teachers.

It has been even more difficult to achieve a sense of racial justice within the school curriculum. This is a subject crying out for sustained empirical investigation — to what extent has the curriculum content and practices of teachers actually changed since 1994? For all the claims of an overarching curriculum framework, our research shows that teachers, especially in the more established and privileged schools, exercise considerable autonomy over how and what they teach. And that autonomy means few history teachers in such schools have, for example, allocated the space or depth to teaching a broader sense of African history that would affirm the rich diversity of cultural and political experiences represented within the student body.

> The last frontier in the quest for social integration and non-racial communities will always be "institutional culture"

The same is true of universities. There are countless examples, but one is worth mentioning here. The so-called "great curriculum debate" at the University of Cape Town between Mahmood Mamdani and his professorial detractors had very little to do with the technicalities of curriculum design or delivery. It had everything to do with what counted as worthwhile knowledge on Africa in an institution whose identity unmistakably bears the deep imprint of colonial England.

And the last frontier in the quest for social integration and non-racial communities in former white institutions will always be this hard-to-define phenomenon called "institutional culture". It is not, for now, organisational culture or institutional climate that is in question. Institutional culture is something different — and simply defined by one of my colleagues as how an institution describes "the way we do things around here." Useful, but how exactly does institutional culture present itself within university or school life?

It has to do with whose portraits and paintings appear in the corridors; what collections dominate the library; who gets honorary degrees (and who does not); who dominates the school governing bodies, and who gets relegated to the status of observers; whose liturgy is represented in the school assembly,

and whose is excluded. It has to do with both the complexion and repertoire of the school or university choir; who continues to gain access to institutional contracts, and who remains marginalised; whose language dominates a public meeting or event, and whose is excluded. It has to do with the kinds of sporting codes a school allows on its grounds, and what is (for some ridiculous reason), excluded; the kinds of public friendships that teachers and leaders of schools model, and that young people invariably witness; the complexion of who works in the school's secretarial pool and the complexion of those who work cleaning the swimming pool; the ways in which women are constructed in social relations on the school grounds or campus; who sits together in the staff-room, and who sits somewhere else. It has to do with who gets called "Mr" and who, irrespective of age, is simply called "Klaas". It has to do with the content of what appears on the emblem of the institution; the content of school songs; the metaphors for talking about others; and the ways in which schools or universities talk about the future.

It is in this domain of democratisation where institutional cultures (that education institutions fail to include) accommodate and affirm racial diversity and difference, community and commonality. It is in this domain where the assault on the cultural senses of incoming black students conveys powerful messages of who the institution is for. Symbols matter, as the noted scholar Chabani Manganyi observed in relation to institutional transformation.

Our research team found the concept of "home" to constitute perhaps the most telling expression of how students feel in relation to former white institutions. We commissioned a research paper, prepared by Lionel Thaver from the University of the Western Cape, which unpacks the potential and dilemmas of this concept for understanding inclusion and exclusion for those who inhabit higher-education institutions.

In the end, the real test of whether South African institutions have achieved inclusive institutional cultures might well be the extent to which black and white students "feel at home" within universities.

It would be naive, however, to believe that such constructions of power within education do not find a corresponding resonance and reinforcing substance from what happens in the broader society. Among families, political parties, religious organisations, sporting associations and in business communities, essentialist views of racial identity retain a deep meaning within everyday life.

This constitutes a major obstacle to resolving the fiction about essential racial identities that lie at the root of what is brought into school. Such notions of firm and inflexible apartheid categories are continually reinforced through bureaucracy, including — in powerful ways — instruments such as the national census and the employment equity schedules.

But the problem of redressing racial divisions in education cannot proceed without identifyin2g the specific "points of power" that sustain the status quo in schools and in universities. I wish to raise singular examples of these points of power for purposes of illustration only. There are many other such points in the power constellations of educational institutions.

In schools the most crucial point of power is the school governing body (SGB). This is the entity that dictates the pace, content and direction of change (or non-change). What is often observed is that even when black student numbers increase to visible or even majority membership of the registration total, white parents continue to dominate this powerful decision-making body in a school. It is this body that decides which teachers to appoint, how and for how long to appoint them, and under what conditions of service.

Given the crucial decisions that such a body is empowered to make, it is understandable, therefore, that much of the political machinations in and around the SGB can be seen when vacancies become available and the school schemes to retain white membership — or at least white majority membership — of such an institution. When it comes to the racial patterning of institutional cultures and appointments, the equivalent point of power in universities is not the university council, or even its senior management. It is the middle-level management, both in the academic and the administrative divisions.

It is readily observed that institutions are able to create diversity and signal inclusive directions at the levels of senior management and student admissions. But the institutional culture is largely carried in the locus of middle-level management. In higher-education institutions, therefore, these points of power are much more distributed than in schools — but they are also unevenly distributed and it is my contention that interventions should target the middle-level establishment to leverage durable changes in culture, curriculum and complexion.

It is the middle-level management that, in the academic sphere, decides on who gets appointed into an academic department. I do not wish to be sidetracked here into the fictitious debate about the standards of the academy or the availability of skilled, black academics. The point for now is that deans and heads of department are the effective gatekeepers of academic appointments, and no amount of mission or vision-directedness by senior management or policy, or legislative posturing by government can change this simple fact. A different kind of intervention is required. It is also the middle-level management in the administrative sphere that determines the language of the signage that appears on campus; the pace with which new symbols or signs appear, if they appear at all, on the instruction of the senior management. It is the middle-level management, especially in white universities and technikons, that creatively and perniciously ensures administrative labour remains white and male in certain job occupations and white and female in others.

These points of power should be identified and inte.rupted if South Africa is to move beyond the sporadic outbursts of politicians about "the lack of transformation", or the routine defence of in titutions about "the lack of qualified candidates", or the unconvincing rationalisation of black academics on the move about "the lack of support". What does this mean for leadership? What, espe-

cially, does this mean for leadership under conditions of social transition? It is important in this respect to approach the transformation of educational institutions with a strong sense of sobriety. On the one hand, leadership matters — and the research on this subject is unequivocal. On the other, leadership in the context of a negotiated transition is a constant struggle to balance binary tensions.

Such tensions include the need to manage and, indeed, demonstrate a balance between inclusion and correction, affirmation and anger, accommodation and insertion, and racial reconciliation and social justice.

Any leader approaching this context of transition without being completely destructive of persons and institutions will realise that an approach signalling a bulldozing bravado is both misleading to external audiences and, in the end, self-defeating to internal constituencies. Yet it is possible to harness the authority and integrity of leadership in ways that advance the democratisation of universities and schools. Leadership is a key point of power in making democratic gains over time.

And it is leadership that is being contested within higher education in the context of mergers. South Africa has not been blessed with outstanding scholar-leaders of universities whose capacity and integrity are beyond repute. Yet it is in leadership struggles where some of the most intense and complex debates about race and democracy are being played out.

The recent appointment of Theuns Eloff as vice-chancellor of the newly merged North West University (NWU) is a case in point. Two of the candidates who did not succeed in their quest for this powerful position of leadership were Sipho Seepe (acting vice-chancellor of Vista) and Thandwa Mthembu (deputy vice-chancellor at Wits). These two candidates, outraged by the decision of the Interim Council of NWU, essentially made the point that Eloff was not an established scholar (as required by the advertisement) that he was a newcomer to higher-education administration, and that the procedures for selection were not fair and transparent with respect to other, more credible scholars.

Eloff made the mistake of responding and confirming that he was not an academic but that he had other strengths deemed to be of value to the council. The council then responded and confirmed that while scholarship was important, so was strong management and business competence. Furthermore, two of the independent and black observers, both vice-chancellors — Malegapuru Makgoba (University of KwaZulu-Natal) and Dan Ncicayana (Durban Institute of Technology) — had also recommended Eloff for the position. Nevertheless, Seepe and Mthembu threatened legal action.

There are a number of ways in which one can approach an analysis of this unusual window on race, democracy and education in South Africa. First, one could dismiss this incident as a case of an incompetent advertisement. In this argument, NWU had exposed itself badly by placing an advert listing qualities for a new vice-chancellor that did not match the competence profile of its preferred candidate, Eloff.

Second, one could comfortably rationalise the decision of the council in the context of our research on mergers, that show very clearly that in an inter-institutional merger, the stronger partner (in financial capacity terms) tends to call the shots. Moreover, in all cases studied, the vice-chancellor elect comes from the stronger institution. So it was almost inevitable that Eloff would emerge as the preferred candidate.

Third, one could also view this decision to appoint Eloff as a function of the growing managerialism (or what some call the new public management) that has engulfed universities worldwide, in which the vice-chancellor as CEO is valued more for his (in this case) business acumen and management competence than for scholarly standing or research accomplishment. In this context, Seepe and Mthembu were, by far, lesser candidates.

Despite the explanatory purchase of each of these three explanations, it would be a mistake to overlook the racial logic and political underpinnings of the NWU decision and the contestations that followed. What is unarticulated, at least in the public sphere, is much more revealing of what this case is actually about.

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On the side of the historically Afrikaans universities, it is clear that none of these institutions have yet been able to make the psychological and political shift towards appointing a black vice-chancellor. In fact, it is quite clear that the merger would have faced a formidable political challenge from the powerful alumni and other stakeholders of what was only recently still called the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education.

Eloff was, in my view, the compromise candidate — an insider who, despite his broadly progressive credentials, was a safe pair of hands for the Afrikaner establishment, one that would not sacrifice the impressive cultural, linguistic and material resources of this small but powerful institution for the sake of its Mafeking partner — weak managerially, financially and academically. In this sense the advertisement of the position of vice-chancellor was an unnecessary risk, for the sake of what many called "transparency". In reality, the outcome was seldom in doubt.

On the side of the contestants, the outcome smacks of racial privilege and preference. The contestants seriously believe that they are more experienced managers, more established scholars, and more familiar with the higher-education sector. But it is much more than that. Underlying the discontent of the contestants is a logic that the time of black leaders to lead white institutions had come. By excluding such leaders from these last frontiers of white power, the transformation of institutions could, in fact, not be claimed to have occurred.

Whether or not Seepe and Mthembu would be stronger candidates than Eloff for the position of NWU vice-chancellor is irrelevant, although I certainly have my personal views on the matter. What concerns me is the posturing of both parties:

the failure to broaden democratisation to include black vice-chancellor leadership in the former Afrikaans universities, and the presumption by black academics that by virtue of identity, such positions should be occupied by persons of colour.

In other words, white universities must make the transition to changing the identities of their vice-chancellors as perhaps the most visible point of power for the democratisation of institutions. At the same time, privileging race in these senior positions is extremely dangerous unless it is backed by a broad consensus that the eligible candidate is, in fact, a leading scholar and a competent manager. Unfortunately, such an assessment cannot be made by the contestants themselves.

What all these cases pose, though, is a troubling set of questions about the value and efficacy of participation in our young democracy. It is worth recalling that participation was the touchstone of student struggles against apartheid education. The demand for democratic participation in education was one of those "non-negotiables", and it included participation by all stakeholders in the affairs of a school. SGBs were the embodiment of this vision forged in struggle.

In universities, the broad management forums and now the "institutional forums" became the symbol of this quest to broaden and deepen stakeholder participation in higher-education institutions.

But participation has proven to be much more complex, contorted and contested than what the liberation slogans seemed to suggest. Once the demand for formal participation had been met, it was gradually realised that policy intentions fell far short of practical outcomes. In other words, there was a growing recognition of the need to problematise participation in the realm of educational practice.

In higher education institutions, participation has also proved to run into problems of power and asymmetries of power that few could have anticipated during the heady days of the education struggle.

The levelling assumptions that were assumed to come through stakeholder politics did not take account of the reassertion of institutional power on new terms in the post-1994 period. No doubt the national swing towards fiscal austerity under growth, mployment and redistribution policies — and to which managerialism was the institutional response — changed the terms under which universities engaged with and understood their responsibilities towards stakeholders.

This "new managerialism" was expressed through centralised decision-making, dramatic cuts in institutional budgets, the retrenchment of staff, and the creation of an entirely different campus climate in which accountability trumped autonomy, quality assurance replaced trust, and surveillance self-management in higher education institutions.

It is not uncommon to observe in these institutional forums how management continually outflanks students and that powerful council chairs could, in fact, completely override any sense of democratic decency that was presumed to result from a process of open election by various stakeholders engaging each other on equal terms. This complex phenomenon is the subject of ongoing research by the Centre for Higher Education Transformation in the light of the devastating experiences of the University of South Africa and other institutions where councils had, in effect, become dysfunctional despite meeting the formal requirements of democratic participation.

The formal arrangements for democratic education are clearly in place. The suite of education policies produced since 1994 are impressive.

But policy is not practice, and while an impressive architecture exists for democratic education, South Africa has a very long way to travel to make ideals concrete and achievable within educational institutions. What is a matter of concern is that there are no viable planning strategies within the Department of Education to advance democratic education inside schools or universities in a sustainable and meaningful way.

In fact, one of the most distressing effects of recent state actions on democratic cultures has been the emphasis on performance-based accountability systems expressed in schools through the matric exams and whole school evaluation; and in universities through a series of interconnected surveillance methodologies including the recent quality-assurance audits.

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The Council on Higher Education (in the case of the audits) and the Department of Education (in the case of whole school evaluation) have yet to convince that these systems separate compliance accountability from institutional support; or that policy compliance will, in fact, deliver corresponding institutional support.

What these new surveillance measures have effectively done is to muzzle any serious or sustained attention in schools to matters of deep learning about democratic principles and practices within the lives of teachers, learners and community.

The final grade of high school (grade 12) has become nothing more than a high-intensity and high-stakes testing environment in which learners spend their time preparing for school-based, "mock" and final matriculation exams to shield schools from governmental scrutiny, and to compete mindlessly for public recognition. In the process, education lost its soul.

It is also worth recording that the pursuit of social integration as a benchmark of democratic education is likely to be limited in public school environments. For a long time to come, the majority of black learners

will receive their formal education within the confines of all-black schools. In some ways, a disproportionate amount of research and political energy has been spent discussing racial integration in a small minority of former white schools. The task for policymakers, politicians and practitioners, then, is to clarify how respect for difference can be built and sustained in such schools, even if the point of departure for such intervention is not "race".

Despite what is done in schools, however, it is also worth noting that far too much emphasis is being placed on schools to deliver democratic thinking and practice when such institutions operate within nested communities that often signal contrary values and behaviours. These nested communities include religious organisations, sports clubs, domestic or family environments, and political parties or government. Schools are, in fact, much more permeable to ideas, practices and behaviours from these nested communities than often acknowledged.

It cannot be reasonable, therefore, to demand that schools change their behaviour when violence persists in townships, when political leaders demean each other in an election year, when the state fails to act in the face of regional chaos and corruption, when life-prolonging drugs are withheld from ordinary citizens, and when the presidential inauguration is conducted through the medium and metaphor of unprecedented militaristic displays of state power and authority in the air and on the ground.

Despite its obvious limits, schools remain the lifeblood of this young democracy. What happens in schools matters, and matters enormously. The choices young people make depend crucially on their experiences of schooling, including the experience of living with others or living with difference. And it is in schools and universities where democratic practice must continue to be pursued over the next 10 years. Much remains to be done.

Professor Jonathan Jansen is dean of the education faculty at the University of Pretoria. This is an abridged version of his paper "Race, Education and Democracy after 10 Years: How Far Have We Come?", prepared for the round table on education held at Pretoria University in July. The Institute for Democracy in South Africa convened the round table as part of its project, Lessons from the Field: A Decade of Democracy