Chapter #7

SOCIAL IDENTITY FORMATION OF BLACK LEARNERS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORICALLY WHITE SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT
The chapter engages with the issues influencing the social identity formation of black learners attending historically white schools (HWSs) in the Northern Cape province of South Africa. Black South Africans were treated as intellectually and racially inferior during the apartheid years. The situation was further exacerbated when black learners were admitted to HWSs. Consequently, the school that should normally contribute to developing a positive social identity formation of learners, seemingly has the opposite effect on black learners. An empirical investigation, by way of quantitative research, was employed to ascertain the issues influencing the social identity formation of black learners in HWSs. The authors, however, report on the data segment of 10 selected items pertaining to social identity formation, which was one of the components of an extensive doctoral study questionnaire, which was completed by 832 black learners enrolled at 27 HWSs in the Northern Cape province. Some of the findings indicate the manifestation of negative influences, low educator expectations, the disjuncture between home and school education as having an effect on the social identity formation of black learners. This chapter proposes certain suggestions to be considered by HWSs in South Africa to possibly mitigate the identified challenges.

Keywords: learners, historically white schools, social identity formation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The first democratic elections in 1994 made it possible for black learners to enrol at multicultural schools, more specifically historically white schools (HWSs). Many of these HWSs, who previously exclusively catered for learners from monocultural backgrounds, responded to the opening of schools for all learners by adopting an assimilationist approach. Assimilation is perceived to be the dominance of values, traditions and customs of one group in framing the social context of the school (Soudien & Baxen, 1994). According to Fataar (2010), learners from a cultural origin other than that of HWSs' existing culture and identity had to identify with and follow acceptable cultural expectations and behaviour. Within the boundaries of HWSs, cultural wealth, values and norms of black learners are perceived to be inferior to that of white middle class knowledge-based trusts, values and social standards (Lemon & Battersby-Lennard, 2011). This situation in turn provides unfertile grounds for the instilment of common experiences, mutual understanding and healthy social interactions. It stands to reason that black learners' sense of social identity (culture, heritage, language and traditions), and consequently the intricacies associated with their self-concept, are relegated to the archives in these white learning settings (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017). Therefore, the employment of racially representative teachers in former House of Representatives (HOR), House of Delegates

(HOD), and House of Assembly (HOA) schools is crucial in defending and upholding learners' interests and issues pertaining to learner diversity and inclusivity (Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Neluvhola, 2007). It needs to be noted that black learners in former racially homogenic schools may experience various barriers to learning that white, Indian, or coloured learners do not, which may be owing to the lack of appreciation for their culture, race and language which inevitably may affect aspects confined to learners' social development, such as their socialisation, interactions and identity formation.

Research undertaken by Erasmus and Ferreira (2002) in a similar regard, implies that the development of positive social identity formation of black learners attending HWSs is intermittently under attack. These perceived attacks may take many guises and may appear to have a racial undertone. Equally, Davids (2018) contends that education in South Africa remains profoundly racialised, notwithstanding the concerted efforts made in post-apartheid South Africa to circumvent racism. In keeping with the racial undertone of education, Erasmus and Ferreira (2002) conclude that positive "mirroring" about the general self is important in the development of an affirmative social identity formation during the adolescent phase. Likewise, Webbstock (2016) advises that transformation in education could play a critical role in training socially responsible, independent citizens. However, destructive occurrences at HWSs, as mentioned earlier, may steadily erode any positive feelings of self-worth and self-esteem, which in turn will affect the social identity development of black learners. These destructive manifestations may be intensified by feelings of marginalisation and non-belonging to the in-group. Regrettably, social exclusion and marginalisation are still visible in many of these schools, based on sporadic media reports. A case in point is a media report by News 24 (Karrim, 2020), stating that students from former Model C (HWS) schools in Gauteng, the Western and Eastern Cape, as well as KwaZulu-Natal provinces, and others have posted their experiences of alleged racism at their schools by teachers and fellow students. Nonetheless, social exclusion is hardy only about unequal access. It also includes exclusionary institutional and academic cultures, in relation to teaching and learning, curriculum development and pedagogical practice (Badat, 2010; Mavuso, 2019). All these mentioned forms of exclusion and marginalisation mitigate against the development of a positive social identity. The aforementioned is supported by Schwartz, Côtè and Arnett (2005) in their assertion that social identities and even inter-personal identities are interrelated with individuals' categories of otherness (race, class, gender, religion) and, depending on the context they move into, individuals can either experience inclusion (acceptance) or exclusion (marginalisation). In the same manner, Markus and Kitayama (1994) caution that danger might satisfy when individuals attempt to satisfy their need for belonging. In this process, learners at HWSs may develop their own in-groups with "exclusive" memberships. Should these groups be created along racial lines, it could promote racism and precipitate an unintended cycle which may threaten peaceful co-existence within HWSs.

2. BACKGROUND

In South Africa the official and formal racial segregation of schools commenced in 1948, when the white Nationalist Party came to power. The racial, ethnic and geographical separations within the education system led to the formation of 15 separate education departments which operated until the advent of the new South African democratic dispensation in 1994. As part of the ideal of democracy, the new South Africa aimed at providing an equal and quality education system for all of its citizens and to abolish the stratified education system of apartheid (Apartheid was a system of institutionalised racial

segregation that existed in South Africa from 1948 until 1994). The aim of the white apartheid government was to subject black people in South Africa to a subordinate education system that was based on maintaining control and reproducing inequality (Dolby, 2001; Arendse, 2020). Black people in South Africa were regarded and treated as both intellectually and racially inferior during the apartheid years, which invariably could have influenced the healthy social development of citizens. Mwamwenda (2004), Ndimande (2013) and Mogashoa (2019) echo this view by stating that there was hardly any situation in the life experience of many blacks during pre-democratic South Africa that created the space for the enhancement of a constructive social identity formation.

As part of the ideal of democracy, the new South Africa aimed at providing equal educational opportunities for all so as to abolish the stratified education system of the apartheid period. The aim of the apartheid system was to provide the black population with an education that was inferior to the education received by white learners (Dolby, 2001). Consequently, the turnaround to a desegregated school system in the early 1990s led to an influx of non-white learners from working class communities to HWSs. Mpisi (2010) contends that literature is depleted with perceptions such as "that blacks have no initiative", "that they will always say yes when they should have said no", "that they are emotional and have the innate habit of not keeping time and talking around the point". Regarding these perceptions, the authors argue that there may be traits which blacks had developed, because of exposure to an unfriendly and threatening environment over a period. The opposite may have held true, if blacks had been exposed to a more amicable environment, such as that of people of European descent.

Furthermore, several media reports highlight the tendency of some HWSs to continuously engage in exclusionary practices. One such example is where a school in the Gauteng province in South Africa formulated its language policy in such a fashion that it excluded black learners, because they were not proficient in Afrikaans (Macupe, 2018). Another example is the incident reported in The Guardian (2016), where a historically white school passed a policy declaring black school girls' hair styles "untidy". Furthermore, protests held in 2016 by learners in HWSs, such as Pretoria High School for Girls, highlighted their experiences of racism, school rules that stipulated hairstyles and the ban on the speaking of African languages. This protest snowballed to other HWSs in Cape Town who supported this protest and brought to light learners' experiences of discrimination. Christie and McKinney (2017) describe these protests as the "peak point in years of struggles against discrimination" (p. 2) in HWSs that still exist in South Africa. To be more specific, discrimination is embedded within the school rules and policies for uniform, hair, and religious attire and customs other than those of Christianity. These are clear examples of how the norms of the past are still deeply engrained within the HWS spaces as some of these institutions continue to uphold allegiance to an apartheid legacy.

The Northern Cape province in South Africa is not excluded from the abovementioned developments. In the Northern Cape province of South Africa, where the research reported in this chapter was conducted, the white teacher component represents the overwhelming majority, while the black educator component constitutes the minority of the overall teaching component in HWSs (Northern Cape Department of Education, EMIS, 2020). Although the racial composition of learners was changing due to learner migration, the teaching staff in the previously racially homogenic schools (HWSs), remained overwhelmingly unaltered (Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Pathlane, 2017). However, failure by HWSs to maintain a healthy balance between enculturation, acculturation and de-culturation may prove to be confusing to the black learner. This confusion may in turn hamper the development of a positive social identity formation for the black learner, (Ntuli, 1998; Kieran & Anderson, 2019). November (2010) argues that transforming an education

system means encouraging citizens to be critical, so that they are able to function within a democratic society. Sayed (2004) and November (2010) advance similar arguments, and support the view that schools should be prepared to understand and function in multicultural classroom settings that operate according to the values and ideals of a democratic South Africa. A racially diverse teaching staff is invaluable for transformation, as well as a school culture which reflects healthy human relations and social interactions between teachers and learners, and amongst learners.

In conclusion, one can deduct from this background that all citizens and multicultural schools in South Africa have a crucial role to fulfil in developing the social identity of all learners.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter explores the issues influencing the social identity formation of black learners attending multicultural schools, more specifically HWSs in the Northern Cape province of South Africa. The authors report on aspects relating to social identity formation, which was one of the components of an extensive doctoral study questionnaire completed by black learners enrolled at HWSs in the Northern Cape province of South Africa. The objective of this chapter is not to deride race relations in HWSs, but to extrapolate the findings of this small-scale study to historically black, coloured and Indian schools, based on 10 selected items from an extensive questionnaire used for a doctoral study. The aforementioned schools are also open to all race groups, hence future research of the phenomenon, as it presents itself in HWSs, may assist the authors in acquiring rich and in-depth understanding of issues associated with learners' social identity at these institutions.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section provides a synthesis of the methodology, presentation, and discussions of findings on the 10 selected items, which were part of an extensive questionnaire used for a doctoral study conducted with 832 black learners (grades 10-12) from 27 HWSs in the five educational districts of the Northern Cape province. This research was based on the probability sampling method, in which stratified random sampling was employed. A self-designed, four-point Likert scale questionnaire distributed to 269 white teachers and 832 black learners, probed aspects pertaining to characteristics, issues and challenges that both learners and educators are confronted with, as well as the scholastic experiences of black learners in multicultural high schools in the Northern Cape. For the purpose of this chapter, the authors report on the data component of one aspect of the extensive questionnaire, namely the social identity formation of black learners attending HWSs in the Northern Cape province of South Africa (see table 1). In other words, the authors used a data segment confined to the social identity formation of black learners. Permission to conduct the empirical study was sought from the Northern Cape Education Department, school principals and learners of these specific schools. The methodology, presentation of data and discussion of findings therefore present a snapshot of a certain part (10 items) of the questionnaire which has bearing on the social identity formation of black learners in HWS contexts (see table 1 below).

Table 1.
Summary of learners' responses in relation to questions about social identity formation in HWS contexts.

Questions	χ^2 Value	p-value	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
			%	%	%	%
1. I experienced no difficulty in adapting to my school.	1	0.486	41.8	40.3	13.5	4.4
2. In our school, all learners, irrespective of their cultural background, are treated the same.	1	0.565	27.5	38.2	25.8	8.5
3. Enrolling black learners in former white schools has led to a drop in standards.	1	0.477	15.1	33.7	32.8	18.4
4. Educators have higher academic expectations of white learners than of black learners	1	0.523	25.7	28.8	26.7	18.8
5. Black learners tend to be more withdrawn than white learners during group work and other class activities.	1	0.524	20.0	30.5	32.9	16.6
6. The failure and drop-out rate tend to be higher among black learners than white learners.	1	0.539	27.8	36.4	22.9	12.9
7. I am more comfortable to be taught by educators belonging to my own culture.	1	0.489	18.5	42.6	20.5	18.4
8. I sometimes experience conflict between what I am taught at school and what I am taught at home.	1	0.475	18.6	42.5	23.3	15.6
9. My friends who are not attending historically white schools still accept me as a friend and have not changed their attitude towards me.	1	0.623	57.8	31.6	7.2	3.4
10. If I could choose, I would prefer to attend a historically black school.	1	0.518	18.0	16.5	29.1	36.4

Note: The difference is statistically significant if $P < 0.05$

In terms of the demographic data of the learner participants, the majority (54%) of learners in multicultural FET (grades 10-12) schools in the Northern Cape were female, whilst 45.9% of the learners were males. With regards to race, most (57.5%) of the learners were coloured, 36.5% were black and only 4.8% and 1.2% were other and Indian respectively. The majority (64.0%) of the learner participants' home language was Afrikaans, followed by English (10.0%). Most of the learners (39.1%) were living in historically coloured areas. A total of 21.2% of learner participants resided in the vicinity of their school, 20.8% resided in townships, 18.3% lived in historically white areas, and 0.6% in former Indian areas.

Most of the learners (82.1%) indicated that they had no difficulty in adapting at their school – this is contrary to views held by Cross and Mkwanazi-Twala (1998), who opine that black learners' social identity formation is adversely affected because of the difficulties they experience in adapting to the historically black school context. The fact that learners indicated equitable treatment, in spite of their cultural background, may bode well for the social identity formation and enhancement of these learners. This finding concurs with that of other researchers, such as Kieran and Anderson (2019), who state that all learners should be treated equally, while still considering their diverse background. The latter authors further highlight the potential influence and negative perceptions held towards certain cultural groups at schools, as these may influence the social identity formation of learners. The cultural background of all learners is an important consideration in the teaching and learning process (Conklin, 2015). Learner participants (50.5%) seemed to concur with the literature in that they believed that black learners tended to be more withdrawn than white learners in class. HWSs dealt with integration in a manner that has been characterised by asymmetry, in which white people are the bearers of preferred knowledge and blacks, by contrast, as the embodiment of inferior understanding of the world (McKinney, 2010). This state of affairs is hardly conducive for the formation of a positive identity. A total of 54.5% of learner participants indicated that their educators held higher academic expectations for white learners and that the failure and drop-out rates tended to be higher amongst black learners – this according to 64.2% of learners. These findings concur with the recent foregrounding of social justice and equity in educational discourse (Cho, 2017; Arsal, 2019). To this effect, Świdzińska (2019) advises that teachers could assist learners by understanding their culture and supporting them in adapting to their new environment. Scholars in the field, such as Mampane (2019), found that when teachers understand the culture of learners, learners experience a sense of belonging. The majority (61.1%) of learners indicated that they were more comfortable to be taught by educators belonging to their own culture. An overwhelming percentage of black learners experienced conflict between what they were taught at school and home, respectively. These findings echo the sentiments of Erasmus and Ferreira (2002). They argue that children cannot be treated as learners in the normal sense without considering their immediate background and family history, as well as the impact of these factors on their reaction to the learning environment. Moosa (2018) supports this notion by insisting that the aim of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes is to prepare student teachers to teach efficiently in diverse school settings.

In conclusion, although the literature suggests rejection of black learners by their peers who attend township schools, the findings revealed the contrary. Correspondingly, the findings of the study dispute the argument presented by Erasmus and Ferreira (2002) who postulate that, when given a choice of schools, black learners would choose a school where all race groups are equally represented. The findings suggest that the majority (65.5%) of black learners prefer attending HWSs.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The sample only included white teachers teaching in HWSs in the five education districts of the Northern Cape, and the situation in relation to social identity formation may differ in other provinces of South Africa. The chapter, which forms part of a broader PhD study, only focused on the perceptions of black learners in HWSs and not on the perceptions of learners of other racial identities.

6. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

- The implementation and monitoring of cultural awareness programmes that permit learners to learn about their classmates' cultures and practices in less-threatening spaces should be promoted in HWSs. In these settings, learners can interact with one another and learn about each other's cultures, languages, traditions and heritage.

- Teachers in HWSs need to embark on a journey of self-transformation towards effectively teaching diverse and inclusive classes. Teacher self-transformation is cardinal in advocating for social justice and equity in multicultural school settings. The development of learners' social identities can be improved and advanced if teachers, the school management team, and the parent community make a concerted effort to effectively respond to and eradicate various forms of subtle and institutionalised racism, biases, prejudices, discrimination and stereotypes. Culturally Responsive Teaching could be used as a tool to connect learners' cultures, languages, life experiences and world views with what they learn and are taught in multicultural school settings, such as HWSs.

- In terms of pre-service teacher training, consideration by education authorities should be given to empower future teachers in dealing effectively with diverse classroom dynamics in HWSs. Pre-service teacher trainers should model, by means of practical examples, how social justice, equity and inclusive practices could be applied in the classroom during lesson presentation. Through certain life skills training/education initiatives, certain competencies (intercultural communication, interpersonal skills, decision making, problem solving, conflict management, critical and creative thinking, constructive relationships, and health promotion) could possibly be directed at developing learners' social identity. The findings suggest the need for further investigation into the reasons why there is a lack of proportionate representation (appointed of black teachers) in the HWS settings of South Africa.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter was meant to examine the complexity of social identity formation of black learners attending HWSs in the Northern Cape province of South Africa. Findings from the literature and empirical investigation indicated that some situational experiences encountered by black learners at these schools may well curtail the development a positive social identity formation. The display of adverse effects, such as general adaptational challenges, unreceptive and unkind teacher behaviour influence the social identity formation of black learners. Teachers are inherently responsible for assisting learners in developing or enhancing their social identities. Hence, it is crucial that the

critical pedagogical imperatives, such as low educator expectations (of black learners), the disjuncture between home and school education, as well as mitigating the high failure and drop-out rate, be addressed, both in teacher education and continuous professional teacher development programmes. While most studies on social identity formation provide the perspective of education planners and administrators, this study focused on the perspective of the learner. This implies that teachers teaching black learners in HWSs should be cognisant of the aspects impacting on their learners' identity formation in future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to the following people and organisations for their invaluable contribution towards the study:

- The Northern Cape Department of Education for granting us permission to conduct the empirical study
- All school principals, educators and learners who participated in the study, for their time in providing information relevant to the study
- Staff members of the libraries of the University of the Free State and Sol Plaatje University, for their professional support with the acquisition of the relevant literature
- The END 2021 conference organising committee, for the opportunity to contribute this chapter, as well as the constructive feedback and advice
- The authors of the chapter, for their co-operation and critical engagement

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