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An investigation into the gaps and conditional enablers between policy discourse and implementation: a case study of diversity and transformation policy in a South African school

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2021
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/31827

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iii. Abstract

This study attempted to broaden the knowledge base around diversity and transformation policies in South Africa, and understand the causes of implementation gaps as well as means to create conditions that would enable transformation and social justice to be achieved in schools through such policies. There is limited literature around the topic, given that much is written about the existence of policy gaps, but very little has been written about bridging these gaps. Through a case study and inductive coding, under the premise of unpacking power relations through Foucault's analysis of discourse and power, this study considered the lived experiences and narratives of school teachers in a pilot study in order to establish the true essence of the problem. Teachers, leaders and pupils in a case study school that had recently designed and begun implementing a rich and inclusive transformation policy were then closely investigated in order to unpack the needs of schools. This was done in order to understand teachers' and pupils' perceptions around why policies that promote social justice have either not been well-implemented, or else not been priorities in schools. It also investigated which conditions would ideally enable transformation and diversity policy to be meaningfully implemented. The study was located in a post-modern paradigm, which utilised the tools of semi-structured interviews, document analyses of existing policies and an online questionnaire.

The assumption of this study is that schools operate as microcosms of society, and that enabling conditions for social justice to be achieved are integral for transformation in South Africa as a nation. This leads to the assumption that, because the hidden curriculum in schools, in other words, that learning which happens outside of classroom in a social environment, operates with as much social power as formal academic programmes in defining the whole child, national transformation is possible if the hidden curriculum can be better defined and leveraged.

This study ultimately found that transformation is complex and inundated in much "white noise" with little purpose to many teachers. Schools are aversive to fully embracing transformation and diversity for a multitude of reasons, including how it is not prioritised in schools, or else riddled with assumptions and stereotypes that hinder the process; however, the overall conclusion of many teachers is that, with the correct representation, input from leadership, and willingness from teachers and pupils, transformation is possible.