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Exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools: a phenomenological study

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2021

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/31848

Dlamini, Siboniso Phathumuzi (2020) Exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools:a phenomenological study, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/31848>

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Abstract

The aim of the research on which this thesis is based was to identify learners' perceptions regarding their progression from one grade to the next without meeting pass requirements in four mainstream secondary schools. To this end, the study sought to explore how progressed learners' identities were shaped in an environment where they are considered to be 'low' performing learners. The study intended to offer learners in mainstream secondary schools settings a voice regarding being progressed, as well as to share their personal experiences on the implementation and practice of the progression policy which has led to the creation of the "progressed learners" identity. The participants of this qualitative study comprised four principals, four focus groups made up of five Grade 10 educators and 16 Grade 10 progressed learners, eight of whom were males and eight females from the four different schools. The study adopted a phenomenological approach in which the participants gave their lived experiences pertaining to the progression policy. The study briefly examined the nature and implementation of the progression policy in the South African context in relation to inclusive education internationally and locally. The primary finding of this qualitative study indicated that the experiences and voices of progressed learners are often overlooked by educators in mainstream secondary schools. Furthermore, the findings of this qualitative study indicated that both principals and educators have limited knowledge on the implementation of the progression policy which is inclusive in nature. From the findings it is evident that, given the dearth of knowledgeable principals and educators in the selected schools in the Gauteng province committed to the implementation of the progression policy, the Gauteng Department of Education needs to provide the requisite teacher training to pave the way for the implementation of the progression policy. Consequently, the current policies regulating the implementation of inclusive education in the Gauteng Province are in urgent need of review to create the best opportunities and ensure the best results for the learners concerned.

Key terms: inclusive education; identity; social identity theory; marginalisation; retention; progression