

PROJECT PORTRAIT

Barriers to Racial Integration in School
#167 (2014)

What is this project about?

This was a sociological study done at Bridge Town High School. The school has mainly black and coloured learners, with the two groups often at loggerheads with each other. The school requested a study to help them achieve racial integration.

The research focused on looking at what was preventing meaningful integration (primarily in the institutional culture and structures of the school); and to identify possible solutions to overcome these barriers. Issues of dominant culture, exclusive language, and lack of opportunities for common bonds were identified and solutions offered.

The research

The study was designed in collaboration with the school. It looked to gain different perspectives and understandings of the school over three weeks.

The study method used:

- interviews with different learners and teachers,
- informal conversations,
- observations of the classroom, and
- a study of the curriculum.

The study itself and interpretation of the findings were grounded in relevant literature.



Extra-mural activity as space for racial integration

What you need to know:

Meaningful integration between racial groups in high schools will not happen of itself. It is important to recognise aspects of the institutional culture which (seem to) exclude one group. Ignoring this and expecting new students from other areas/ groups to simply fit in can lead to racial tension, violence, exclusion and prevent students' sense of belonging.

The research findings

The research found that:

- If students were unable to identify with staff of a different race or have open conversations about race, this created an exclusionary culture;
- Language barriers promote segregation, especially if not tackled properly by the school;
- With a lack of opportunities to form bonds (e.g. in shared extra mural activities) the focus stays on differences;
- Different dress-wear acts as markers of differing race/background/class;
- Distinctly separate home & school cultures can create 'outsider' identities for previously excluded students.

The following solutions were recommended:

- Hire staff that are representative of the groups attending the school;

- Encourage staff to allow open and non-judgmental conversation;
- Introduce and support the teaching of languages of previously excluded students (e.g. isiXhosa);
- Offer extra-mural activities, either by the school or outside groups, to create spaces where common bonds can be formed;
- Develop a dress code that will not make the less advantaged learners stand out.

Using the research

Solutions to these problems may be similar across previously single-race schools in the Western Cape. But each school will have to consider its specific barriers and tensions.

The study was completed in **November 2014**.

Want to know more?

A Sociology Honours student, Lara Karasselos, completed this study at the invitation and help of staff of Bridge Town High School. She was supervised by Prof. Owen Crankshaw. The thesis is available on the Co-op website.

Keywords: Racial Integration, High School, Segregation, Institutional Culture

To **reference** this Project Portrait, cite UCT Knowledge Co-op as the author.

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