Perspectives of School Governing Bodies on Best Practices in Desegregated Schools: Preliminary Findings

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Abstract

This paper presents the perspectives of school governing bodies on best practices in desegregated schools. The paper is drawn from a study conducted in 9 schools that have engaged in the process of desegregation since the policy was instated in 1995. The paper departs from the point that school governing bodies as centres of power in schools play a pivotal role in shaping the direction of school both in policy formulation and the governance of schools. Key preliminary findings presented in this paper shows that albeit that SGBs perceptions on best practices relates to common commendable practices in schools, desegregated schools present invaluable opportunities in preparing learners for their future lives in a democratic South Africa.
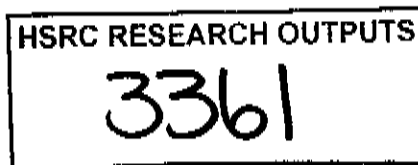
a result other schools use this privilege to regulate admission of learners and appointment of black teachers.

It is the view of this study that, SGBs are not merely stake holders, rather key role players in the schooling system today, thus, it became imperative to consider their views on issues pertaining to "best practices" in desegregated schools. That "leadership is a key point of power in making democratic gains over time" a point raised by Jansen (2004, 125), is the crux of our justification for the inclusion of SGBs in this study. Therefore, this paper presents an analysis of the views and perceptions of SGBs in desegregated schools.

The following section presents the analysis and discussions. The presentation starts with the demographic background of the SGB in this study, learner representation, typologies of best practices, opportunities for learners in these schools, challenges that are encountered and ends with a brief synthesis.

RESULTS

Data used in this paper was solicited through a questionnaire instrument that was both qualitative and quantitative in nature, as it comprised of *open-ended and closed-ended* questions. The selection of quotes used in this paper was purposive to stress the points emerging out of the data.

Demographics and representation in the SGB structure

The intention of this study was to have all the SGB members of sampled schools participating in this study; subsequently the response rate was at an average of 6 members per school albeit with an exception of one school where only 1 person responded. In total 39 SGB members participated in this study.

- *Gender and position*

The table below shows the distribution of SGB members by gender and position.

Position	Gender Male	Female
Chairperson	5	-
Deputy Chairperson	2	2
Secretary	-	2
Treasurer	2	-
Parent Representative	0	1
Teacher Representative	2	2
Ex-Officio/Principal	3	-
Non Teaching Staff	-	1
Co-opted members	2	5
Total	**16**	**13**

It is also revealing in this data that female members occupied positions of deputies and additional members whereas their male counterparts continued to dominate the position of power in the SGB structure. For instance, male members occupied all chairpersons, treasures and ex-officio/principals positions in the SGBs. These positions are centres of power in the SGB structure and this trend poses a threat to the goals of equity and thus makes gender and racial equity in school governance elusive.

- *Race distribution*

The results of this study show that still in 2004, SGB representation in desegregated schools is still characterised by the racial historic background of the schools. The table below presents distribution of respondents by race.

Africans	5
Indians	5
Coloureds	11
Whites	16

Jansen (2004, 123) noted that regardless of black learners increasing or dominating, white parents continue to dominate the "powerful decision making body" at school-SGB.

Other studies have suggested that even where Africans were represented, they continued to occupy additional or co-opted positions with positions of authority dominated by their white counterparts (see McPherson, 2001 in Karlsson 2002, 332). Contrary to this view, this study found that almost all Africans who participated in this study occupied senior executive positions. One was an ordinary additional member when the rest occupied executive positions- chairpersons and treasurers.

- *Educational levels of SGB members*

According to Karlsson (2002) effective participation and execution of roles in SGB is contingent on their educational levels. He suggests that a link exists between educational levels of SGB members and the effective or ineffective way in which SGBs function. If this is anything to go by, SGBs in the schools that participated are or should be functioning effectively. Karlsson's study observed a trend in the position at school and level of participation of SGB members in meetings and the decision-making process. It is mentioned that principals played a dominant role in meetings and decision making and following them were teachers, non-teaching staff, parents and then learners respectively.

The data shows that the education levels of SGB members ranged from matric to honours levels. In terms of the positions they hold in the SGB, those with high education levels were mostly teaching staff. Even non-teaching staff members had qualifications up to honours level.

Matric	6
Matric + 1	1
M + 3	2
M + 4	8
B Degree	5
B Degree + Edu Training	2
Honours	7
Total	31

- *Language distribution*

Schools that participated in this study are all English medium schools. Only one school was dual medium, i.e. offering Afrikaans and English medium. SGB members were asked to indicate the language they speak at home as well as other languages other than their home language. The data shows that only 4 SGB members were African indigenous language speakers, 8 Afrikaans speakers and 26 were English speakers. This is in congruence with the racial distribution of SGB members who participated. As to the question about other languages they could speak; 28 members did not answer this question.

Learner representation

The composition of SGB is made up of parent representatives, teaching staff, non-teaching staff and is common in many other countries as it is in South Africa (Bush and Heystek, 2003). However, in South Africa, the policy provides for learner representation in the SGB, at least at secondary schools (DoE, 1996). In terms of section 11 of SASA, secondary schools, should establish the Learner Representative Council (LRC) through which learners can participate in the democratic governance of the school (DoE, 1996). The inclusion of learner representation in schools is in tandem with the democratic ideals of SASA and the national democracy project.

In this study, not one of the responses comes from a learner. Important and critical questions that remain to be answered are: Does the absence of learners voice suggest that their representation is non-existent or is sheer policy rhetoric? Were they just not available to partake in this study in their capacity as SGB members? Would the results of this study, in particular this section, have been different if learners in SGBs were represented? It is, indeed tempting to conclude that the views of learners in SGBs are suppressed.

Typologies of best practices in desegregated schools

The notion of "*best practice*" is a subjective and contentious. It is not surprising that different people understand it differently. In the context of this study, SGB members

many of whom were parents perceived *best practice* in the context of the provision of quality education (teaching and learning) and promoting the values and ethos of a democratic and non-discriminatory society.

- **Educational quality**

Sayed (2002, 36) emphasises that the establishment of SGBs should propel and engender improvements in quality of teaching and learning

"...establishment of democratically elected school governing bodies in a country may be worthwhile achievement in terms of extending participation and entrenching democracy...it is only when all learners experience improvement in quality of schooling through this process that one could argue that policy has effected significant societal transformation" (Sayed, 2002, 36).

The above quotation suggests that SGBs should be judged by the contribution they make towards the achievement of quality of teaching and learning. The data show that SGB members have a great regard to/of educational quality. High standard of teaching and learning, regular and effective learner assessment, curricula relevance to the day to day activities, educator development and support, promotion of academic excellence were the leading issues raised by SGB members as characteristics of "best practice".

It is not astounding that SGBs in this study are benevolent about teaching and learning effectiveness. Sayed (2002) indicates that middle class SGBs were the ones in position to make meaningful contribution in the teaching and learning process in schools. I guise they are privileged by their socio-economic background and access to information. Without being dubious, the communities and learners catered for by the schools in this study constitute a cream of middle class background.

SGB members also argued that for effective teaching and learning to take place in desegregated schools, there is a need to create an environment that would promote effective teaching and learning. This is an environment free of prejudices where learners are treated equally and have equal opportunities in the learning process. The quotations below capture very well the views of SGB members on this issue.

> *The creation of an environment where educators and learners are respected unconditionally...this environment should allow educators to educate and learners to obtain quality education...*(Member 4 of School 7).

> *Quality of education to all learners without any segregation or favouritism based on likeness between teachers and learners* (Member of 2 School 1)

Some SGB members pointed that the curriculum offered at school should be relevant to the day-to-day activities of the learners. Although this may be vague, it is assumed that given the focus of the study, which is school desegregation, curriculum relevance would refer to a curriculum that seeks to inculcate tolerance, and respect for human rights and equality among learners.

Another example of best practice was identified in one of the school, which had a prodigious after-schools programme through which they enhanced their teaching and learning activities. This increased their *time on task* and was aimed at assisting learners who need additional support. This programme is said to be helping for learners with language and other learning difficulties[1]. An SGB member indicated that this was the result of the school management, which in addition to monitoring of classrooms, also ensured that teachers honour their teaching periods.

For quality education, effective teaching and learning to take place, you need a strategy through which to motivate and reward best performers for their good work. The next section addresses the issue of rewards and awards as forms of motivating learners and teachers to do their best. This is one of the identified examples of best practice.

- **Performance appraisals and awards**

In the current education system, public schools have two options through which to employ teaching staff. Government issued teaching posts is one and SGB teaching vacancy is another. In the latter, schools that can afford through their SGBs are

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[1] Presumably second language speakers. These are learners whose language is not the medium of instruction.

allowed to appoint teachers whose salary comes directly from the coffers of the governing body. Therefore Model C SGBs, which could be referred to as "affluent SGBs", have used the opportunity to maintain their teacher-learner ratio stable without having to wait for government to issue posts.

It emerged that when SGBs were asked to explain what they would consider as "best practice", a mention of teacher appraisal in the form of performance-related remuneration was made. It is suggested that especially SGB teachers should be encouraged to perform highly by offering them competitive salaries. One respondent went further to suggest that a community of dedicated and hardworking teachers would ...

> ... *foster learners to find role models within mixed educator profile*
> (Member 1 of School 4).

There is also a common practice among schools and it came from almost all schools. That is, award giving to best performers. This practice does not only apply to learners rather goes further to teachers and non-teaching staff as well. When asked to give example of best practice in school, an SGB member mentioned that:

> *The awarding of best teachers and non-teaching staff at the end of each*
> *quarter, term* (Member 7 of School 6).

The above quotation although it does not talk about learner awards, it includes both teaching and non-teaching staff. This shows that it is not only the contribution of the professional/teaching staff that is acknowledged but also non-teaching staff. The successes of the school is a collective effort of different individuals at different levels and performing different functions, but brought together by a common vision to build a successful nation.

In addition to principles followed by schools, the DoE award schools whose performance is outstanding in learner pass rates as well as integration. At least one of the schools in this study received the award on the progress they have made with regard to integration as evidenced in the quotations below.

> *we received an award for the [most integrated] school and I believe this*
> *says a lot about our "best practices"* (Member 6 of School 7) [emphasis
> added].

> *...this process has been so successful that the school won an award from*
> *the minister for best [racially integrated] school last year* (Member 2 of
> School 7) [emphasis added].

As pointed earlier, community participation in schools is highly emphasised in the
policy framework that led to the existence of SGBs. The community at large should
be informed on the progress at schools. The next example of best practice presented
here is the kind of interaction between schools and the community they serve, after
which, language across curriculum is also discussed as an exemplar of best practice.

- **Interaction with parents and community involvement**

Interaction between schools and parent body has been suggested as a characteristic of
best practice. Some schools were using newsletters to update parents and community
on the progress that the school is making. One of the schools indicated that they had
weekly newsletters to parents that were aimed at giving parents updates about school
activities.

Parents are not only involved in schools through this communication. Rather they
work in partnership with the schools in many other projects. One SGB member
emphasised that they worked in partnerships with communities in other outreach
projects.

> *Establishment of services and community partnerships related to social,*
> *health, recreational, nutritional and transport programmes etc* (Member 7
> of School 6).

The quotation above shows that working in partnership with communities, schools
can be significant role players in other social problems that face the communities they
serve. They are in a position to play a leading role in tackling other social problems if
there is a mutual relationship with the communities around them.

In another school they harnessed the partnership with communities by encouraging community to volunteer in other projects that aims to raise the profile of the school. This includes fundraising projects as one SGB member puts it,

> *Encouraging parents, learners, educators and other staff to render voluntary service to the school... governing body of the school striving to raise funds including voluntary contribution to the school in cash or another way for the improvement of the quality of education* (Member 7 of School 6).

By encouraging people to volunteer in activities like these, the community develops a sense of ownership to the school and feel that they have a role to play towards the development of the school. This could also be beneficial to children in their growth. In the view of an SGB member, "strong local community based programs instils, social responsibility to children at an early age" (Member 1 of School 4).

- **Language across curriculum**

Issue of indigenous African languages being offered in the school curriculum also emerged. It is suggested that desegregated/integrated schools should consider offering African languages as they continue to attract learners from diverse cultural and language backgrounds. This study has noted that, although there is a strong desire to have African languages offered as subjects it is clear that schools/SGB members would like to maintain the current status quo where English or Afrikaans (in the case of dual medium school) is taught as a subject and also a language of teaching and learning. This is evident on the response of one of the SGB members who had this to say:

> *I also believe that if there is enough of a call for it, all the mother tongue of learners should be offered as extra mural... if there are enough learners to have a class then there should be one, even if parents have to pay for it* (Member 2 School 6).

Offering additional languages as taught subjects is one way of promoting multilingualism (Mda, 2004); true multilingual education is the way in which all languages of learners should be used as medium of instruction. It is the duty of SGBs to promote multilingualism and to determine schools language in education policy, their conceptualisation of multilingualism/multilingual education is limited to

teaching what they call "mother tongue[2]" (-unpopular term among proponents of multilingual education). Two issues should be highlighted. The first issue is about the failure of schools and universities to struggle towards higher levels of integration such as staffing, curriculum, institutional culture integration (respectively) in their order (Jansen, 2004:121). The contention here is that while we have achieved racial desegregation the challenge ahead is a *true social integration*. Another issue is the fact that the outcome of school integration has become assimilation of blacks and other cultural groups into white culture. Soudien (2004) also raises this view. It is these and other similar issues that make the argument that "school integration is and should be deeper than racial desegregation" sustainable.

- **Upholding the values of non discriminative and democratic society**

If there is any yardstick that is used/ will continue to be used to measure the progress in desegregated schools is their ability or inability to uphold the values of a democratic society and equality. This is not surprising given the history of our past. In this regard, SGB members suggested that best practice in the context of desegregated schools should be about schools offering learners equal opportunities and treating them equally.

Although they enunciate democratic values and promotion of constitutional rights, they seldom demonstrate how these values are integrated within the core curriculum. It would seem that human rights education is policy rhetoric if not relegated to extra curricula activities. It remains to be seen what the views of teachers, learners and SMTs are/would be on this issue.

Another issue raised under this subject was the question of gender equality. Contrary to their practice [where female representation continue to be undermined] SGB Members suggested that gender representation should prevail in staff and learner structures. This leaves questions hanging about whether female under representation was deliberate or was it only in this study that their response rate and participation was limited? Also that, in their views, the issue of representation seems to preclude

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[2] Thobeka Mda in Nkomo et al (ed) 2004, gives a historical context in which English and Afrikaans were regarded as languages while indigenous African languages were viewed as tongues or vernaculars. Thobeka goes further to show the different status languages and tongues enjoyed in education.

SGB structures as no mention was made about their representativity. Is this a failure or unwillingness to engage in some self-introspection?

School integration as suggested in this paper is not only about learner integration, rather is about school as a whole. It includes integration in management structure of school, governing bodies and teaching staff as well. Although the SGBs were silent about their own diversity and representativeness, they showed that teachers, learners and administrative staff should be diversified. One SGB Member showed pride of the complexion of his school. This is what he had to say:

> *We have a healthy reflection of our own rainbow nation at school. Every race, creed and colour as well as social and economic background is represented at our school amongst learners, educators and administrative staff* (Member 2 of School 7).

In one of the schools they have a resident counsellors who provide assistance to learners whenever there is a need.

> *We also have resident councillors giving assistance and direction where needed. Where learners experience problems with extreme financial lack, we assist with lunch and support in other ways* (Member 2 of School 7).

As alluded in the above quotation, it is clear that the school recognises diversity to the extent that it includes socio-economic class and that learners from low class are catered and cared for by the school.

- **Celebratory approach to diversity**

Unity within diversity is a message that is spread throughout by the schools and their governing bodies. Efforts of building unity in diverse communities should first acknowledge that "before difference there was sameness or similarity" (Nkomo and Dolby, 2004, 2). That sameness is the fact that we all human before race, we are human before cultural and religious differences, and we are human before our social status and so forth. In that spirit we need to tolerate one another's beliefs and practices. Schools with the advantage of hosting this rich diversity should harness this by giving room for learners to celebrate their unity in diversity. We have found this to be a common practice within schools. In the views of SGB members, these

opportunities are created through "cultural day, sports day, fun day" during which learners observe and practice their diverse cultural and sport activities.

> *Cultural days- Learners dress as of their culture or bring food that they eat on special occasions.... a good variety of families, religion etc. discussed in class* (Member 8 of School 6).

Although we have identified some typologies of best practice and gaps in the practice of some of these schools, desegregated schools seem to present incredible opportunities for learners receiving tuition in these schools. The next section identifies some of those opportunities as highlighted by SGB members.

Learning opportunities in desegregated schools

One of the questions used to solicit information about the opportunities that learners in desegregated schools have, was:

What do you regard as opportunities for learners of different cultures attending the same school?

In response to the above question, the views of SGB members show that schools have an important role in shaping the future of the learners living in a democratic and free society. It is revealing in the data that learners in these schools do not only have an opportunity to learn in the same school but have opportunity to learn to live together and this helps in building a foundation for their future positions in the democratic society.

SGB members suggested that learners in these schools have the opportunity to:

- Deal with stereotypes and opportunity for social interaction
- Develop tolerance, appreciation and respect of human diversity
- Develop diversity management skills

- Learn to adapt to social change
- Develop s feeling of belonging and ownership
- Expose learners to real life at an early age
- Understand diversity in backgrounds
- Prepare all learners for life after school.

The above items summarises the views of SGB members in terms of what they consider as opportunities presented in desegregated schools. It is clear that the suggestions above talks to issues promoting social cohesion and unity in diversity. The question that remains is what are the challenges thereof? The next discussion is an attempt to answer this question.

Challenges that are encountered in desegregated schools

Although being a progressive policy underpinned by the values and principles of a democratic and a united South Africa the process of desegregating schools has presented challenges for schools involved in this process. In the views of the SGB members interviewed in this study, these challenges manifested themselves in various forms, including stereotypes, the proclivity by some people to cling onto the past and the unwillingness (and resistance) by other members of school community to learn/tolerate and appreciate other cultures as well as resistance to new changes in the schools.

It should be noted, however, that there are divergent views about these challenges. Some view them as obstacles to learning while others perceive them as opportunities through which to forge the ethos of a democratic society.

- **Language**

The issue of language is one of those issues in which the views of respondents were divided on it being a challenge on one hand and an opportunity on the other. Those who argued for the former related it to the didactical situation in the classroom where it becomes a challenge if the learner is experiencing difficulties in understanding certain concepts and the teacher cannot converse or even understand the language of

the learner. In this situation it becomes a challenge and barrier for African/black learners to develop cognitively.

As for those who perceived language as presenting opportunities in desegregated schools, the view is that as and when learners interact/intermingle, they learn and understand each others' language and it becomes a facilitator of sharing ideas and knowledge.

- **Stereotypes and prejudices**

Stereotypes and prejudices were also mentioned as some of the challenges confronted by schools. Coupled to these issues, is the element of negative attitudes by parents, teachers and some learners towards other cultures and lack of willingness and enthusiasm to learn about other cultures. Views from SGB members suggest that there are those people within the school community who show expressions of attitude to other cultures while playing big with theirs and this could emanate into racial and other forms of intolerances. As put by one of the SGB members, "there is a tendency of learners to tease one another and laugh when they have to learn about other cultures" (Member 5 of School 7). This seems to downgrade other cultures and learners, teachers and parents must be dissuaded from these tendencies.

- **Learner orientation**

The most serious challenge in fostering a truly integrated school community would seem to be the issue of learner orientation at home. It has been argued widely by SGB members that there are some parents who still want to indoctrinate their children with apartheid and racist ideologies. This becomes a challenge for schools and learners as they come to a school that is integrated with their racist proclivities from home. The quotations below illustrate this view quite clearly.

> *The upbringing from different homes where most parents still carry a lot of baggage from the past. This may have an adverse influence towards a truly integrated society* (Member 6 of School 6).

> *There are always going to be racial differences because learners are still in the process of getting used to being together due to parents still having to get used to the idea of their children being putt together irrespective of "colour"*

or religious denomination. Sometimes previously disadvantaged group would find it difficult to socialise with advantaged learners because of the past (Member 8 of School 6).

Another dimension of these inclinations to the past is that of teachers themselves. Teachers' intolerances may pose a great threat to the goals of integration. Teachers should liberate themselves from segregationist mentality. They ought to value the idea of integration and have an understanding of how to teach and handle these diverse classrooms.

> *...starts with educator –if has baggage of the past and not equipped to deal with diversity this leads to poor integration and acceptance...*(Member 1 of School   4).

Teachers' lack of understanding of learners' background and traditional beliefs has also been raised as an issue of concern. SGB members argued that if teachers are not aware or have no clear understanding of learners' cultural backgrounds, it could lead to misunderstandings.

- **Social class**

Apart from racial, gender and cultural issues as challenges in desegregated schools, the issue of social class emerged to be posing immense challenge. In this regard, SGB members suggested that having learners coming from different socio-economic background posses a challenge for teachers to cope in this quagmire.

There were other SGBs who indicated that there were no problems or challenges at their schools.

> *I foresee no problem. The teachers with leadership from the headmaster handle the issue very well by informing session with the children* (Member 3 of School 8)

> *I do not see it as a challenge/ problem but rather as an opportunity to see how the learners grow and benefit...our school has been achieving academic excellence while embracing---- formation and equity* (Member 4 of School 8)

Surprisingly this view came from one school that is dual medium (English and Afrikaans). It remains to be uncovered whether there is any relationship between this claim (that there are no problems) and the fact the school is a dual medium.

Synthesis

In analysing the views of SGB members about best practice, it should be noted that the challenge has been to differentiate between what these schools (desegregated) regard as best practice and what is or should happen in other schools whether desegregated or not. It is clear that issues raised as typologies of best practice in this paper are not peculiar to desegregated schools. Issues such as quality teaching and learning, communication and community involvement, language across curriculum appraisals and awards are common in schools.

While the study acknowledges that not all the examples and reference to best practice could be practiced at these schools, it does not disavow that some of the responses given are a reflection of what is happening at these schools as some of them have received accolades for their outstanding performances related to the subject of our study.

Despite the above analogy, it is important to also note that SGB members identified desegregated schools as crucial in building a foundation for the future of learners in a democratic society, "united in its diversity".

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Diversity and Integration in Education Workshop

24 February 2005

Time	Session
16:00-18:00	**Arrival and registration**
18:00-18:15	**Welcome**
18:15- 18:30	**Introductions**
18:30-19:00	**Project Introductions** Mokubung Nkomo, Linda Chisholm, Maureen Robinson
19:00-19:15	**DOE Strategy on race and integration** Spiwo Fante
19:15-20:00	Chair: Mokubung Nkomo **Children's literature, multiculturalism, textbooks & diversity** Barbara Lehman (Ohio/CPUT) & Caroline McKinney (Wits)
20:00	**Dinner**
After dinner	Meeting of chairs and convenors

25 February 2005

Time	Session
08:00-09:30	Chair: Dominic Mentor (CPUT) **Best practices in desegregating schools: preliminary findings** Saloshna Vandeyar, Ramodungoane Tabane, Rakgadi Phatlane, Brutus Malada, Makola Phurutse (UP & HSRC)
09:30-10:30	Chair: Saloshna Vandeyar (University of Pretoria) **Analysing national trends and patterns in school desegregation** Linda Chisholm (HSRC) and Mohammad Sujee (GDE)
10:30-11:00	Tea
11:00-12:30	Chair: Sharon McAuliffe (CPUT) **Diversity in Teacher Education and Teaching** Crispin Hemson (UKZN), Maureen Robinson and Denise Zinn (CPUT), Wayne Alexander (CPUT/WCED)
12:30-13:30	Lunch
13:30-14:00	Chair: Linda Chisholm **Reflections** Funmi Amosun (CPUT), Brutus Malada (HSRC), Carolyn McKinney (Wits)
14:00	Closure