

ABSTRACT

Identities are embedded in 'shared experience' and are, by implication, inherently social. It thus follows that identities are not formed, claimed, protected nor resisted in a vacuum. Contextual factors, which are influenced not only by historical processes and events, but also by current social, political and economic forces, are significant determinants of identity. In this study, one of South Africa's former Model C schools was chosen as the research site in which to investigate the relationship between different, but related, contexts, the identities of learners, and the friendships that they formed. Three contexts were examined, namely the historical background of schooling in South Africa, the current school environment and the social context, which refers to relationships between teachers and learners. The teachers, in particular, were found to play a crucial role in shaping the learners' identities. Their views, attitudes towards schooling and methods of teaching were informed largely by apartheid education, and most of their teaching experience was gained within this context. The general feeling among the teachers was that things had worked better in the past, under a system of segregated education. Although they did not reject or disregard the principle of equal education for all, they were not prepared or equipped beforehand to deal with the changes that the Schools Act introduced, and hence little effort was made on the part of the teachers to actively challenge racial stereotypes in a manner that underlies anti-racist education. De-racialised education did not only result in diversity in terms of 'race'. It also changed the language and religious profile of the school. In its interrogation of these, and other, identity markers, this study assessed the ways in which the contexts, mentioned above, have impacted on the learners' conceptions of themselves and others. It is clear that the immediate school context, which is ordered largely by teachers, provides little opportunity for seeking out shared experiences beyond obvious similarities, such as 'race', age, grade, sex, and language. However, despite the similarities among members of friendship groups, in terms of the more overt identity markers, learners display a tendency to group around other shared experiences, such as likes or dislikes, similar tastes or hobbies, and it is these experiences that, learners argue, have brought them together as friends.

OPSOMMING

Identiteit is gegrond op gedeelde ondervindinge en is, by implikasie, inherent sosiaal. Aansprake op identiteit, asook die vorming en beskerming daarvan en weerstand daarteen, vind dus nie in 'n vakuum plaas nie. Kontekstuele faktore, wat nie slegs deur historiese prosesse en gebeurtenisse beïnvloed word nie, maar ook deur huidige sosiale, politiese en ekonomiese kragte, is beduidende determinante van identiteit. In hierdie studie is een van Suid-Afrika se vorige Model C-skole as navorsingsterrein gekies om die verhouding tussen verskillende, maar verbandhoudende kontekste, die identiteit van leerlinge en die vriendskappe wat hulle gevorm het, te ondersoek. Drie kontekste, naamlik die historiese agtergrond van onderwys in Suid-Afrika, die huidige skoolomgewing en die sosiale omgewing, wat na die verhoudinge tussen onderwysers en leerlinge verwys, is ondersoek. Veral die onderwysers speel 'n kernrol in die vorming van leerders se identiteit. Hulle opinies, houdings en metodes van onderrig is hoofsaaklik gevorm deur apartheid opvoeding, en die meerderheid van hulle onderrigervaring is opgedoen in hierdie konteks. Die algemene gevoel van onderwysers is dat die sisteem van aparte onderwys van die verlede beter gefunksioneer het. Alhoewel hulle nie die beginsel van gelyke opvoeding vir almal verwerp of ontken nie, was hulle nie voldoende voorberei of toegerus om met die veranderinge wat die Skolewetgewing teweeggebring het, te hanteer nie. Gevolglik word min moeite deur onderwysers gedoen om aktief rasse stereotipes uit te daag op 'n manier wat anti-rassisties is. Nie-rassige opvoeding het nie net diversiteit in terme van 'ras' tot gevolg gehad nie; dit het ook die taal en godsdienstige profiel van die skool verander. Die ondersoek na hierdie en ander identiteitsmerkers behels die assessering van die wyses waarop bogenoemde kontekste leerders se persepsies van hulleself en ander beïnvloed. Dit is duidelik dat die onmiddellike skoolkonteks, wat grootliks deur onderwysers bepaal word, min geleentheid bied vir die soeke na gedeelde ervaringe buiten opsigtelike ooreenkomste, soos 'ras', ouderdom, graad, geslag, en taal. Tog, ten spyte van die ooreenkomste tussen lede van vriendskapsgroepe, vertoon leerders, in terme van die meer overte identiteitsmerkers, 'n neiging om te groepeer rondom ander gedeelde ervaringe, soos voor- en afkeure, en soortgelyke smake of stokperdjies. En dit is hierdie ervaringe wat, volgens leerders, hulle saambring as vriende.