

**Report:**

**Diversity and Racism Workshop**

**by**

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**for**

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**Democracy Development Programme**

**Date Workshop was held** : **09 October 2008**  
**Venue** : **Fairvale Secondary School Hall,  
Wentworth**  
**No. of Participants** : **25**

### **Introduction**

Having gone through a transition from a regime of segregation and separateness into a democratic society there were many challenges that faced the South African nation. For many it was a culture shock as people from other race groups and cultures came to live in “our areas” and also attend “our schools”. This not only brought with it a difference in skin colour but also opinions, behaviours and values. Although we have come through this “in our stride” it has not been enough. Many, young and old have not really dealt with the deep seated emotions that this has caused.

Diversity, discrimination and racism has found its way into peoples personal lives and many still do not believe that it exists within them.

### **Workshop Objective**

To equip learners with the necessary tools to identify and deal with issues of diversity or of a discriminatory nature that may arise from prejudice, thus enabling them to gain a better multi racial understanding.

### **Overview of Workshop**

Many of the learners came into the workshop a little apprehensive as they did not know what to expect. Due to this their response was quite slow in the beginning but as the workshop progressed they began to relax and started opening up and became more responsive. Inter-action between the facilitator and learners was always open and the learners had a good understanding of the material and they coped well with the presentation.

## **Ice-Breaker**

Learners were seated in their racial groups and this was to help them develop a togetherness as they were not from the same school neither were they peers. Although the activity itself had no relation to the title of the workshop the learners made it fit into the theme of racism and diversity. This clearly indicated their enthusiasm to want to deal with these issues of which they were being torn apart with. This did allow them to relax and within their group as well as with the others who were part of the workshop.

## **Cross –Cultural Understanding**

### *Small Group Activity*

The first exercise of the workshop was for the groups to express their views of the other race groups. It was interesting to observe the stereo-types and perceptions that were documented by each group about their race group and the other race groups. This was a clear indication that although there is integration, mindsets have not changed. Not only did this serve as a release of tension (which could be felt in the venue) but also set the juncture for an informative and mind changing experience.

### *Simulation Exercise (By-Far-By-Far)*

During this exercise the issues of conformity and cultural acceptance was clear. The notion that in a culturally diverse environment one needs to understand another culture to communicate effectively with them and to accept them was difficult for the learners to grasp. This showed that the participants had a low level understanding of not just their own but also other cultural groups.

### *Migration of Cultures*

The exercise By-Far-By-Far showed how in our effort to be accepted we tend to move away from our culture and “adopt” another with out having full knowledge of the adopted culture. This derives from a need of belonging and acceptance. Not only did we discover a need to belong or accepted but there was a distinct understanding that by adopting another culture you imply that yours is not good enough and the other is better. There was some discussion on tolerating and

respecting other cultures and no mention from the participants of embracing other cultures. This was discussed with the understanding that one can only embrace a culture when they have a fair amount of knowledge of that culture; that is about its norms and values.

### *Stereo vs. Surround*

This was left very open for the learners to interpret at their discretion. Some looked at it from a technological perspective while others from a practical perspective. Either perspective provided the necessary relevant information; that although we live and socialize in a complicated, technologically advanced, democratic and integrated reality our thinking is still generalized, idealistic and stereotypical. This indicated that there was a definite need for a surround reality check.

### **Culture Shock**

#### *Trading Game*

Competition always shows up a different side to people, what they are competing is immaterial as long as there needs to be a winner. This proved that when people come into power and change rules to suit themselves the majority will rebel. Not only was it a need for power and control but also the manner in which that was acquired. People became very creative in their cunning, conniving and manipulative in their attempt to have power and control. These, ultimately proved to be fruitless as not only did they gain control but the masses were rebellious. Giving rise to the understanding of why a regime will not work in this country and democracy is the way forward.

### **Paradigm Shifts**

The learners were shown pictures of double image and as they continued viewing the easier it became for them to see both images as appose to the single image they first saw. This was attributed to the fact that when you are made aware of something and the more often you are exposed to it so do you become

attuned. Not only did they see different things but also accept that things are not always as they seem. Many of them saw the same within the pictures, there were a few who saw things quite different which were also acceptable.

### **Dealing with it**

There was a definite understanding that there is nothing wrong with seeing things differently and or being different. Many should not just an understanding by an embracing of this new information that immediate, effective and conscious decisions were made.

### **Evaluations**

These are a few of the evaluations the learners had written on their evaluation sheets.

Coming into the workshop **Meryl Maniram** of **Merebank Secondary School** said, "Oh no not another boring workshop where a person stands in front and feeds us boring useless information." Her comment later was, "Brilliantly put together. It was fun and not boring (as I had expected). Well done.

"It was a real eye-opener, it changed a lot of perceptions and to see race and diversity in a different light," says **Jillaine Lanka** of **Merebank Secondary**.

This workshop has been a real eye-opener, it changed my mindset. Every point that was made was valid. I believe workshops like this one would change the mindset of others the way it has changed my own.

...my whole mind set about racism and how it came about has changed.

I believe it was very informative and has really changed the way I see things in the world.

I experienced a change of heart towards cultures. I now know how to respect other cultures. I think that other people need to learn and know more about our diversity. We all need to change some how.

I have never opened up on other races like today. I have learnt a lot.

It has really opened my mind and eyes and allowed me to feel much more comfortable when interacting with other racial groups. This workshop has really

given me an insight on another perspective on racial issues. It has broadened my horizon. I feel much more confident and motivated.

This taught me that as a black person, I do not have the right to blame any of my other white students for things that happened in the past as they have nothing to do with what happened during apartheid.

Deborah Byron<sup>1</sup> I was really grateful that some of our students were part of the workshop- we really need it. The Coloured students are divided from the Black students. Our teachers would greatly benefit because they are caught up in the ugliness of apartheid and the fear of change.

Chandra Naidoo<sup>2</sup> recommends her peers for this workshop as it makes one think beyond the normal behaviour, norms, etc. of daily lives. She also recommends that learners need to mingle outside their racial groups for a few activities.

The workshop becomes beneficial when learners go back to their schools and form diversity groups within their schools to learn from and educate others.

### **Recommendations**

A follow up program/ workshop is definitely needed with the same learners with the emphasis being on a more in-depth understanding of:

- I. Each others cultures
- II. Developing a way forward for our youth
- III. Practical multi cultural leadership, and
- IV. Creating a positive future in and through our Diversity

Many learners came in to the workshop not knowing what to expect yet at the same time caution was shown due to the title of the workshop. There is a common factor running through all the evaluations which is quite evident and that is these learners have seen the necessity of the workshop in their lives and believe that many others should be learning about this issue as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Educator at Fairvale Secondary School

<sup>2</sup> Educator from Grosvenor Secondary School

This workshop has set precedence and a platform for any other workshop for these learners to then develop, not just a select group, but one that can have far reaching positive rippling effects.

### **Conclusions**

The comments and responses show that not only was the information informative but also relative. One of the verbal closing comments from a learner was, “We are not the “Born-Free” Generation rather our children will be as we will raise them with different mindsets to what we had.” This was a very powerful comment as it indicated that they have made definite conscious decisions to change their stereotypes and perceptions. It is evident that although there is this integration physically, mentally and emotionally there is still division. Stereo-typing is still a reality and thus continues to maintain the divide. Teaching acceptance and tolerance is not enough; this workshop has shown that until there is an embracing of each other then will there be definite change. The comment by Deborah Byron stands true, that we not only need to see learners being part these life changing experiences, but also teachers and other prominent people within society.

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