



Opportunities to bring issues to the table

We hosted two evenings for parents to engage with one another on the issue of racism. We invited a speaker to talk about the racism he experienced as a black South African, and racism that he identified in his own responses to white South Africans. We set up tables of eight, with a teacher hosting each table. We asked participants to ensure that each table had different cultural groups represented. With the scene set by the speaker – and a reminder that the purpose was to share stories, not opinions – we invited parents to take turns to describe their earliest memory of when race became an issue for them. As each group was small enough for a measure of intimacy, and because our parents are not strangers to one another, it was a safe enough space to share memories that were often painful.



Some people had dramatic stories to tell, others remembered seemingly small but significant incidents. For some, this was the first time they had ever heard a deeply personal revelation from someone of another cultural group. These dialogues were greatly appreciated by the parents who attended.

A long, hard look at the language issue

In common with other schools, we wrestled with the problems that arise when a group of people use their shared language to communicate with one another while excluding others from their conversation. We require everyone using a language other than English to switch to English if they are in the company of anyone who might not understand them. This has reduced mistrust and

alienation, as there is no opportunity to use language as a cover for unkind talk, gossip or deliberate exclusion. This is one of many areas where it was helpful to have the insights of board members whose mother tongue is not English. We were able to implement this policy without alienating parents or pupils.

We recently adopted a language policy to promote the teaching and learning of languages used in southern Africa. In the purpose statement, we noted that this is to foster respect, fellowship and reconciliation between people who have historically been divided. Other benefits include validating the worth of different cultures, opening doors of opportunity to learn from one another, countering bias that favours Western culture, helping adoptive black children develop their identity as people of colour, and contributing to the building of our nation and God's kingdom. The practical applications of this policy will include formal instruction in one of the Nguni languages, inclusion of worship songs in the home languages of our students and learning how to greet in languages used in Africa, including southern African languages, French and Portuguese. As these activities are introduced, we have no doubt they will be welcomed by our school families.

Diversity flourishes in an environment of humility

These are some of the humble attempts we have made to foster a school community where diversity is enjoyed, appreciated and accommodated. We, too, long for a nation where, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr, our children “will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character”.⁵ We do this in the recognition that every child bears the image of God, and we welcome them as representatives of the multitudes from every tribe and tongue who will one day worship their Creator in perfect unity. ❀

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References:

1. See: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/tricameral-parliament>
2. Ibid.
3. See: <https://public.getlegal.com/legal-info-center/april-27-1950-south-africa-passes-group-areas-act-formally-segregating-races-and-beginning-era-of-apartheid/>
4. See: <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/lesufi-gives-kempton-park-school-deadline-to-change-hair-policy-20170725>
5. See: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mlks-content-of-character-quote-inspires-debate/>